

Masters & Apprentices: breathing together A rich learning experience for organizations?

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General Abstract

Masters & Apprentices is a unique and successful concert series where young musicians work together with very experienced singers. During a relatively short but intensive rehearsal period they work towards a concert series with a world-renowned conductor. Deep and collaborative learning while maintaining a very high professional standard yields top performance. We assume that profit and not-for-profit organizations, can learn from this special program focusing on conveying deep smarts and implicit experiences.

Main research question:

Which characteristics of this Music & Arts learning environment are conducive to experimentation, learning and professional growth in a corporate setting?

Research design and methodology:

After building a conceptual framework, interview guidelines have been developed for conducting 36 interviews with conductors, masters and apprentices. The analyzed data have been validated in a feedback meeting. The objective of the Eapril 2019 Roundtable meeting is to discuss an approach that enables a meaningful translation of the findings from a Music & Arts setting to learning and development in the corporate world.

Detailed abstract:

Theoretical background

The project shows that it is possible to organize learning by combining experienced professional singers and novices. When studying the constituent characteristics, theoretical viewpoints on informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), social learning (Bandura, 1986), team learning

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(Edmonson, Dillon & Roloff, 2008) and workplace learning (Billet, 2010; Dochy, Gijbels, Segers & van den Bossche, 2011) seem to be attractive, as well as the notion of tacit knowledge acquisition (Polanyi, 1966/2009; Leonard & Swap, 2005).

Participating in the choir assumes a form of implicit competence development during workplace learning that uses the deep smarts of the experienced master, without the need for targeted instruction. Deep smarts are powerful forms of experiential knowledge and often unconsciously present among experts (Leonard & Swap, 2005). The transfer of such deep smarts is only possible through jointly undergoing the rehearsing and performing process. Talking about deep smarts makes little sense, at most as a reflection afterwards.

Research questions

The following research questions are central:

1. What do young musicians learn during the collaboration in the Masters & Apprentices program?
2. What makes the approach successful? What is the role of the conductor, the coach, the master(s) and the apprentices in this?
3. Which characteristics of the learning environment are conducive to experimentation, learning and professional growth? Which characteristics are obstructive?
4. What can managers, HR staff and training professionals in other contexts learn from the Masters & Apprentices program when it comes to organizing, designing and developing learning programs?

Research design, instruments and methods

To provide an answer to the above research questions, a concise conceptual framework has been designed as described briefly in the introduction. A strong emphasis is on making informal interaction between masters and apprentices explicit. A detailed interview guide has been compiled based on this framework. Subsequently, 36 interviews were conducted with participants in the Masters & Apprentices program of the past five years: 3 conductors, 7 masters, 25 apprentices and 1 coach. The first analysis was shared in a round table meeting with 4 master, 5 apprentices and the coach. The researchers have asked additional questions for clarification. The next step is to translate the findings from this music practice into the world of human resource development in companies, schools, hospitals and government organizations.

Potential contribution to practice-based educational research

The talented musicians all commit to a higher goal. It makes feedback and critical awareness of quality self-evident. The participants submit to the authority of the conductor of free will. The aspects of a common higher goal and the role of the chosen hierarchy are worth exploring further in labor organizations. The motives of the singers to make something beautiful and unique is probably the core of pride in craftsmanship. It is remarkable how the high artistic goal exerts a great attraction on the participants. Leadership seems to be about expressing a jointly supported ambition and working towards this without compromise. The apprentices experience the essential feeling of being desired and needed. It is probably an important ingredient in preventing meaningless work and getting caught up in the drama of the bullshit jobs (Graeber, 2019). Many internships and knowledge exchange programs for new professionals can use this principle of meaningful participation.

The main challenge to be addressed in the round table when starting the next phase in the research project:

What can managers, HR and Learning & Developing professionals learn from the Masters & Apprentices concert approach?

Based on the preliminary research results of the Music & Arts project you may conclude that organizing, designing and developing learning environments can be very successful if the content really matters, is meaningful, and fits in with the ambitions, motivations and dreams of young professionals.

If everyone is able to play an active role from the outset in a project where the participants are really needed, feel recognized and appreciated in a pleasant, safe and caring environment, then the bar can also be very high, the road uncompromising and the feedback on the intermediate results, direct and straightforward.

Which research design makes a translation possible of these learning experiences in a successful concert practice to the corporate world?

Breathing together?

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For further information see:

<https://josephkessels.com/kessels-j-berghs-g-de-jong-t-2019-masters-apprentices-breathing-together-rich-learning-experience>

