

Motivation: culture and ethics

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Our starting point: Higher Education

I have this personal dilemma: I have been given the opportunity to make a substantial promotion, but it will be at the cost of my colleague, whom I have known for 10 years now, and although he is a little older than I am, and more experienced, he is somewhat more conservative in his ideas, but since he has a different cultural background that is explicable. The problem is: do I accept the promotion and in the process make my colleague's

In our professional environment, which is the field of Higher Education in the Netherlands and Europe, we see that education is in a constant process of change: the forces in society demand that we develop more flexible learning routes and environments, which are defined both by the student and by the professional field. Both “consumers” ask for specific, tailor-made education, making it necessary for me to take a step back from traditional forms of education, in which my focus used to be on:

- (1) transferring knowledge towards new forms where it is more important for me to facilitate
- (2) what students want to learn.

From self management to gyroscopic management

These developments towards a more demand-driven education are continuously being nourished and boosted by a coherent system of stimuli, moving individuals like me and my students to action. This coherent, but rather complex system we represent by making use of the metaphor of a gyroscope¹, by which we refer to constantly changing contexts and contacts, in which the “self”, I as I have become by nature and nurture, need to find stability — after regular collisions with other “gyroscopes”, my colleagues, my students, my friends, etc. Stability which would enable me to perform on a high(er) level in my professional context.

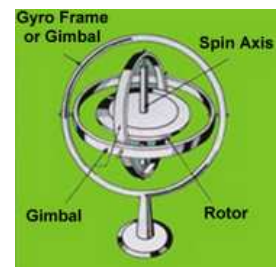


Figure 1: A gyroscope (cf. Google)

¹ A **gyroscope** is a device for measuring or maintaining orientation, based on the principle of conservation of angular momentum. In physics this is also known as **gyroscopic inertia** or rigidity in space. The essence of the device is a spinning wheel on an axle. The device, once spinning, tends to resist changes to its orientation due to the angular momentum of the wheel. (Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyroscope>).

place obsolete, or do I allow my colleague to take my place, let him make promotion and pass the opportunity? It may be the last chance I get. But then again, it definitely is the last chance my colleague will get. This is confusing, frustrating, in one word horrible. Why do I have to make this decision? Isn't this something my boss should decide? I mean, if she decides, I don't have to be embarrassed towards my colleague, my friend. How will he react, if I accept the promotion?

What will my wife say if I turn down this excellent opportunity? She has been waiting for this chance to get away from it all for three years, already. Now if I turn down this opportunity, she might get very angry at me. Maybe she'll even leave me.

Come to think of it, what will happen to my colleagues kids? I know his youngest wants to study abroad. Now this

Our main focus is to put students on the track of what we call “gyroscopic self management” and in the system of stimuli we concentrate mainly on **four** interdependent areas of expertise, traditionally represented by subjects in the educational field. The fields we focus on are: Culture, Communication, Ethics and Human Resources² (see figure 2). These in traditional education separated professions come together in me as the acting subject in the form a coherent system, whenever I am making autonomous decisions.

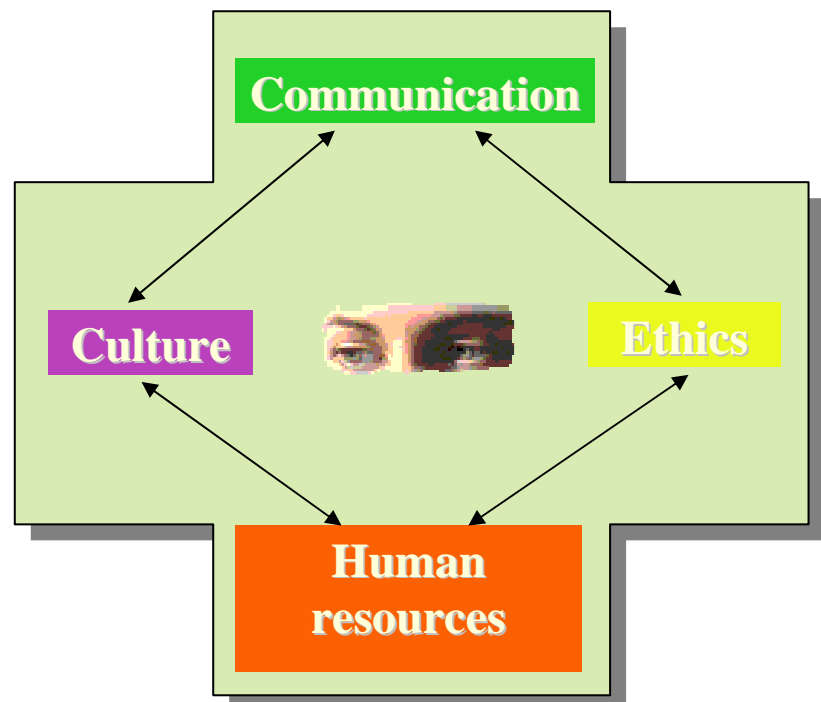


Figure 2: Interrelated dimensions of human performance

Through this integrated and integrative approach the different aspects get and create added value. The different aspects or educational subjects or even professional fields, are separable, but the separation always creates an artificial, and therefore awkward situation:

*in my professional environment the fields are **not** distinguishable, and within me performing in my profession, ideally the different subjects **are** integrated, forming a coherent system enabling me to perform on my academic level in my chosen profession, as if the aspects form components of a gyroscope (me), that, once having been given a swing, starts getting in motion (me performing in my profession), gathers momentum, and by doing that it **automatically** creates its **individual** equilibrium.*

² In our perception HR is regarded as the so called “human source”, that is the specific input in an organisation, that can only be preformed by **humans**, in other words: the added value that a person brings in an organisation.

might become impossible for him to finance. He might even get demoted for his inability to adapt to the new situation.

How I am going to be able to live with myself, if I make it impossible for my colleague to stay working in the company he loves?

If I accept the promotion, how am I going to tell him? If I don't accept, how am I going to tell my wife?

And all that because I got this great opportunity!

The gyroscope can be observed, from a distance (by the eyes in the figure), but when in motion it is difficult, if not impossible to observe the **separate** fields in the system. In for me order to observe, or analyse the different fields, the gyroscope has to be stopped, and by that my equilibrium is destroyed (creating this awkward situation³).

Furthermore in interacting with other people (individual gyroscopes, each with his own balance) situations change, as if the gyroscopes collide and each individual has to find a new balance. In this process of interaction and change finding an inner balance represents my learning process, my initial frustration

Figure 3: The question is: "Who has the monkey?"



(anger, hurt, confusion, happiness, feeling lost, indifference, etc.) occurring when I do not comprehend what is going on, gradually makes way to understanding. This process is usually regarded as a gradual development from a state of confusion towards full understanding. We believe however that real learning takes place in short, sometimes even violent, bursts, between which the change can be quite suddenly and aggressively,

even. We call this a form of serendipity⁴.

³ Which, by the way, is the "standard" situation in traditional education: interdisciplinary work is difficult to organise, since professionals have their expertise and are more often than not reluctant to share their expertise with "laymen"; so education is still largely organised in separate disciplines, creating a non-lifelike situation. Our objective with gyroscopic management is to create a situation that is as much as possible like the professional field, like real life, or better yet, use real life situations, professional products and processes, which is **not** the same as making use of cases, however good the intentions might be. In traditional education therefore, the halo-effect, when knowledge or skills obtained in certain disciplines has positive influence on knowledge and skills (to be) obtained in other disciplines, is minimal!

⁴ **Serendipity**: to make discoveries, by accident and sagacity, of things not in quest of. The word **serendipity** has come from an old Persian fairy tale and was coined by Horace Walpole 28 January 1754, in a letter he wrote to his friend, Horace Mann, the English resident in Florence:

"I once read a silly fairy tale, called *The Three Princes of Serendip*: as their highnesses traveled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of: for instance, one of them discovered that a mule blind of the right eye had traveled the same road lately, because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right—now do you understand *serendipity*? One of the most remarkable instances of this *accidental sagacity* (for you must observe that *no* discovery of a thing you *are* looking for, comes under this description) was of my Lord Shaftsbury, who happening to dine at Lord Chancellor Clarendon's, found out the marriage of the Duke of York and Mrs. Hyde, by the respect with which her mother treated her at table."

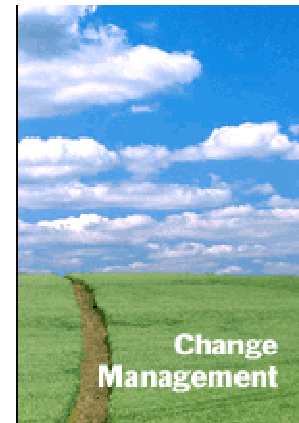
Why is this important? Well, first of all, because in professional education we want to prepare the student for his profession, and as we have seen this performance in a profession requires an integrated approach towards processes and products. The current educational system is not sufficiently equipped to facilitate **individual** students in **their** study career towards certain professional profiles. The student more and more often make his own choices in that, and expects the educational organisation to be flexible enough to go along with him.

In this the student is looking for a reward for his motives, since it is in his interest that he gets prepared for his future professional career in the best way possible⁵, and we feel he may expect the organisation to facilitate him in that choice. Education can only be motivating if it satisfies the **individual** needs that students have. The education therefore needs to focus more on satisfying, or rather intrinsically rewarding the student's motives instead of extrinsically trying to motivate students through supply oriented education.

The gyroscope in educational and professional contexts

We believe that more attention is necessary for the skills of stakeholders: what they put in. In preparing trainings or lectures, in contacts with people in the professional field, and in my own position in my own organisation, I develop these skills, in a process of what we call "gyroscopic self management". This gyroscopic self management contains three important elements:

- The realisation that the decisions I make are also motivated by the way I was culturally formed;
- There is an added economical value of my decisions for the organisation I work for;
- This realisation should implemented in concrete actions in the organisation, and this can be done in different ways.



As given by W.S. Lewis, ed., *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, Yale edition, in the book by Theodore G. Remer, Ed.: *Serendipity and the Three Princes, from the Peregrinaggio of 1557, Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by Theodore G. Remer, Preface by W.S. Lewis*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1965. LCC 65-10112. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serendipity>).

⁵ And that is **not** meant to be the best way for the institution, but the best way for the student!

In practice we see that students when they have finished their education experience a lack of foundation for making critical decisions and for dealing with the consequences of these decisions, however well they are acquainted with the necessary knowledge and skills. Properties like: the ability to take initiative and a certain amount of guts, communicative skills or cultural consciousness appear to be crucial more than knowing which instruments are available to realise the change in the organisation!

Traditional education offers models and instruments, usually from the perspective of the **differences** in the disciplines, often disregarding or forgetting that it is necessary to create halo-effects or, to stay in the gyroscope metaphor, to give the gyroscope its initial “swing”, creating a changing but stable equilibrium, a professional performing well on a high level in his professional field. In colliding with other gyroscopes, the students then find themselves in a situation in which they are forced to find a new balance, and this is a process that keeps repeating itself. We do not pretend to be able to give them answers to ethical, cultural, communicative or Human Resource oriented problems, but we do create opportunities in which they are forced to constantly find a new balance for themselves, and we do that by facilitating opportunities which allow them to learn.

That this does not always take place in a safe environment, is probably obvious. If we want to prepare our students as well as possible for their future professional career, we do that best when we create the situations and atmosphere that reflects this professional field. This of course is **not** a safe environment, especially from the point of view of business students. To re-create this business environment, with its perils, culturally and personally, especially when there are forced (ethical) decisions at stake, we do things the students do **not** expect. But we **do** get their gyroscopes to start. And our experience is that we **do** make them understand that imbalance in itself is not a bad thing, that **change** can be a positive process, and that constantly finding new balances, in relationship with all the other gyroscopes around us, can be an exhilarating experience!

For further information:

Frans Johansson (2004): *The Medici Effect. Breakthrough Insights at*

”Explicit rewards, then, can be an effective way to kill off our creativity. Why, exactly? Amabile has found a connection between our internal drive, or intrinsic motivation as she calls it, and our creative efforts. If intrinsic motivation is high, if we are passionate about what we are doing, creativity will flow. External expectations and rewards can kill intrinsic motivation and thus kill creativity. When intrinsic motivation drops off, so does our willingness to explore new avenues and different ideas, [...]. This means that in order to stay motivated and execute an intersectional idea, [...] we must be careful of explicit, external rewards. Stephen King puts it this way: “Money is great stuff to have, but when it comes to the act of creation, the best thing is not to think of money too much. It constipates the whole process.” “
(Johansson, p. 138)

the Intersection of Ideas, Concepts, and Cultures. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Toine Sterk, Frank Vonk, Joop Vinke (to appear): *From self management to gyroscopic management*. Assen: Van Gorcum [probably mid 2007].