

Product vs Process: How personal values affect approaches to Leadership and Management within a participatory arts practice.

Overview:

"Leadership is a balancing act." (Cartwright, I. 2012:432)

I feel it prudent to briefly outline the contrariety in my work as a trained filmmaker and as an informal educator. This dichotomy can be simplified as the old adage 'process vs product' debate. Jeffs and Smith say that project work can help communicate an organisation's identity as well as offering opportunity (Jeffs & Smith, 2012: 278). For my organisation (The Rural Media Company), I would go one step further and say that not only does our project work help communicate *who* we are but also shapes *how* we approach that balancing act between process and product. This dichotomy will be a reoccurring theme throughout this essay; I hope to explore how my values, leadership and management feed into and shape the situations I am faced with as an Informal Educator.

Background

In 2013, our organisation, The Rural Media Company (RMC) received funding to deliver two BFI Film Academies over two years. The BFI launched this national scheme to help train and inspire the next generation of British filmmakers and offer training for every film industry role through regional centres (RMC being one of two in the Midlands). In practical terms, I am part of a Mentoring team that takes the filmmakers (18 young people, 16-19yrs old) through that process. As the process reaches the half way mark the group splits into smaller film crews, each crew has their own mentor. The mentor's role is to facilitate their development and help the young people to make their own short film.

The Situation

The Academy culminates in each crew producing a short film. The crews were responsible for every aspect of film-making from development, scriptwriting, storyboarding, planning, location hunting, auditioning actors, shooting, directing, lighting and editing. My crew developed a script called "Pumpkin", a story about a little girl who uses her imagination to escape the nightmare of domestic abuse (Pumpkin, 2014). As an Informal Educator, I spent a lot of time discussing with the crew how careful they would have to be in their storytelling as not to trivialise, simplify or misrepresent this issue. As a filmmaker, I wanted there to be meaning behind their compositions, their character arc and overall tone of the film. Meaning and significance is at the heart of a good film and in understanding what they wanted to say, the crew started to understand how they were to say it i.e. what conventions of film would help communicate their story.

On their final planning day, I asked the crew to look at their shot list and storyboards so that they were fully prepared to shoot their 'dream sequence' scene. Their dream sequence was the most symbolic scene; where the audience fully engage with the protagonists' experience of domestic abuse. By the end of the day, the crew had re-assured me that they had done sufficient planning and although I didn't see a lot on paper, they had it planned in their heads.

By the afternoon of the first shooting day, we'd approached our 'Dream Sequence' scene. Immediately, I knew the crew had not planned sufficiently and the shoot came to a grinding halt, as if all of the months of training and preparation had not happened. As a filmmaker I cannot let this lull continue for very long; we were on a time limit and at the end of the day

we need this scene done. As an educator, I had to be aware of several things. Firstly, the crew had clearly underestimated how difficult this scene was to shoot - I put this down to inexperience. Secondly, their inexperience was inhibiting them from using their initiative to find solutions. I knew they had to:

- scrap their inadequate prep work
- plan and shoot simultaneously

What happened next is what I found most challenging. I had to slow the shoot down so they could talk through the importance of this scene. The team had to determine where to place the camera and lights to adequately shoot this scene, taking into account different angles to covering multiple actors and actions. From that point, the crew had to deal with their:

- inexperience
- stress and time management
- group's goals
- personal confidence levels
- ability to work as a team to get the job done

They made many mistakes which I knew at the time would jeopardise their final product. I questioned some of their actions and camera set ups but not once did I tell them "that's a wrong move and your film will suffer because of it". Basically, I knew they were making mistakes and didn't correct them.

Analysing my approach to the situation

'Much that happens in groups revolves around issues of authority, power and control'. (Brown, A. 1994:73). At the moment I chose not to intervene and correct the group's mistakes or commandeer the shoot I was making a conscious decision about how much power and control I should exert as their mentor. French and Raven (1976) (ibid. p 73) classed different kinds of Power within group dynamics to which I can identify myself with two: **Legitimate Power** (power vested in me as the group facilitator) and **Expert Power** (power of perceived expertise as a professional filmmaker).

As a starting point, I had to recognise what power I had and how it influenced the group. I would call this 'ownership of power'. In A. Brown's book 'Groupwork' (ibid. p 74), Brown makes a good point of explaining how denying one's power and authority in leadership can be detrimental to group development. If you cannot realise your own potential how do you expect to realise someone else's? Moreover, how would you teach someone how to handle the responsibility of power?

After assessing what power I had, I slowed the shoot down to allow the group to plan their next actions, to take control. I also slowed the group down because I wanted them to own their mistake. I wanted them all to realise that they had stopped because they didn't plan when they should have and in doing so potentially ruined the shoot. Fortunately, by the end of the day they had completed the scene.

This leads me on to reflecting on my own values and how they influence my leadership and management style.

Values, Leadership & Management

When I was 10 years old I remember playing pool with my dad. We played several games, all of which I lost and I remember asking my dad "Why won't you let me win?" My dad replied with

"Well, would you rather win because I let you or win because you played better?" At that moment I realised that my dad's ability wasn't the thing stopping me from winning, it was my lack of ability that was stopping me. Sure, my dad's skills were a contributing factor, an opposing force as it were, but it's then I recognised a gulf between where I was and where I wanted to be. I needed to *improve* to be a better player.

I think that's what I was doing when I stopped my crew so they could plan. Yes, I wanted them to own their mistakes but I also wanted them to take control as a group to rectify it. Through talking it through I wanted them to realise that they had the power to turn things around. I wasn't punishing them for failing temporarily but I did want them to deal with their temporary failure, just like I dealt with losing those pool games. This concept of 'ownership' in all its forms, from owning power, responsibility and owning failure underpins a lot of my work and my approach to leadership and management.

For me, this approach is a very good balance between process and product. The crew acknowledged their shortcomings and still managed to find a way forward. Johnson & Johnson would describe this as using two types of leadership styles, both of which are essential for effective leadership (ibid. p 71):

- **Task Leadership** - Chiefly concerned with achieving objectives and group goals.
- **Group Maintenance** - Putting the relationships and people within the group first, as well as listening, empowering, resolving problems and building trust.

This model serves at giving characteristics to 'product' which could fall under task leadership and 'process' which could be defined as group maintenance.

Leadership and Organisational Goals

The situation I've used for this assignment was difficult for me at the time. I knew that it could have gone a number of different ways other than the way it did.

- The group could have buckled under pressure
- They could have lost confidence in themselves knowing they under-planned
- They could have lost faith and trust in me if I had been too harsh on them for their mistakes
- I could have lost sight of my main purpose 'to empower my team' if I had placed 'product' over 'process'.

However through Group Maintenance, more specifically, building trust over the months leading up to this situation, I could trust my group to find a way forward. This enabled them to achieve the group's goals and strike a balance between process and product.

As stated earlier, this balance is fundamental not only to the work I do, but how it reflects The Rural Media Company. Isabel Cartwright looks at the relationship between leadership and organisational goals (Cartwright, I. 2012:419). On leadership, Cartwright looks at Peter Drucker's work and how an effective leader is someone who's goals are aligned with the organisations (ibid. p420). Case and point, some of Rural Media's aims are to..

...'Create high quality film, photography, web, and print resources, that reflect diverse rural communities and issues, and challenge stereotypes and prejudice...' (Ruralmedia.co.uk, 2014)

...'enable rural communities, including those most disadvantaged, to participate in media activities, develop skills, self-confidence, and a 'voice'...' (ibid.2014)

Therefore, by staying aligned with the organisation's goals, striving for high production values I am in turn enabling rural communities (in this case my crew of young filmmakers) to develop skills, self-confidence and a voice through participation. For me, Cartwright's article is quite empowering, it re-enforces why I do what I do, and thus, gives my work more meaning and significance.

On reflection, one could argue that I had an opportunity to avoid the whole situation by making the group plan more. If I had a strong enough suspicion, of which I did, that they needed to put more work into their plan and I hadn't informed them, I was essentially setting them up to fail. I did that because I don't necessarily believe failure is a completely negative thing. However, would I have done that for any and all groups? I am not so sure. Trust and confidence are vital if an Informal Educator is to let young people confront failure. If I didn't feel the trust was in place I would have taken more control and used my legitimate power to finish the scene. What I do realise is that I didn't have a contingency plan in place. If the group had reacted completely out of character and negatively to their initial failure, I would have been fighting fires all afternoon trying to pull everyone in the same direction. I would have strived to get the group working autonomously but it would have been extremely difficult.

Unfortunately I think that's the risk with film work, and also the reason why we spend so much time planning and developing our young people so that their process is aligned with the end goals.

Conclusion

Through reflecting on the meaning of both 'process' and 'product' I've come to the understanding that I cannot hold one in favour of the other, not because it's unethical but because if I am to stay true to our (RMC) core beliefs, they both reflect and feed into each other. If I neglect the process but still had a film at the end, the film would be surely be a poor quality product by the company's standards. If I failed to produce, then I would have not enabled the people to have a enriched and meaningful process through making and participating. My values have strengthened as I realise just how vital effective leadership is to realising my own potential as well as other people's potential. In writing about this situation I have written in detail about my reflection in and on action, I would now like to end with a reflection that came to me much later on, a few weeks after shooting the dream sequence scene.

The film was premiered at The Borderlines Film Festival 2014. We invited Oscar nominated Cinematographer Richard Greatrex (Shakespeare in Love, Run Fat Boy Run) along to give feedback. After Pumpkin was shown, Richard talked in detail about the technical issues he had with the dream sequence which he deemed "poor" compared to everything else in the film - he didn't hold any punches! I watched as my team smiled and chuckled with embarrassment. It was then that I realised that I hadn't helped my group overcome failure, I helped my group embrace failure as part of the learning process... in spite of receiving constructive criticism (albeit a tad negative) from a Hollywood filmmaker!

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Glossary

1. **Cinematography** - The art of photography in moving image form, using camera and lighting techniques in film-making
1. 2. **Composition(s)** - The pleasing selection and arrangement of subjects within the picture area. Movement, pace, sound and music and action within the picture area also influence an audiences reaction to the composition.
1. **Shot List** - A check list that determines how many individual compositions/shots make up a scene in a film.
1. **Storyboard** - A drawn panel representation of the film (much like a comic book strip) that depicts different shots within a scene in a film.
1. **Character Arc** - The journey a character within a film takes from the start of the film to the end of the film, usually concerned with the character's development and their

relation to the narrative.

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