Who is Calling the Shots? Using Boal's Theatre to Enhance Reflexivity in the MBA Classroom

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Abstract

This article is an account of our experience as educators, of using Boal's theatre in the management classroom to enhance career reflexivity in future managers. We developed the "Career Stakeholders exercise" to facilitate students to draw upon their individual and collective experiences in making conscious career choices. Adapted from Boal's "Cop in the Head" techniques, this exercise is aimed at identifying and working with internalized messages and expectations that influence career decisions. Our use of Boal's theatre in this format provides a playful, non-threatening and experiential approach for reflection, reflexivity and dialogue. Here, we discuss the premise and context of our course, rationale and process of developing this exercise, our experiences and insights as facilitators, and student feedback, to present the benefits and challenges of introducing Boal in the management classroom.

Key words: Boal's theatre, applied theatre, reflexivity, art-based learning

Who is Calling the Shots? Using Boal's Theatre to Enhance Reflexivity in the MBA Classroom

This article describes our experience as educators, of adapting Boal's theatre to facilitate reflection and dialogue in the MBA classroom. Our guiding question was: how can theatre techniques be used to enhance reflexivity in management students with respect to their career choices? We introduced Boal's theatre in an elective course titled "Personal Values, Goals and Career Options" (PVGCO). This course is in itself a breakaway from the conventional subjects in the MBA curriculum. It involves engaging students in a reflection on their individual goals, strengths and values to enable authentic and meaningful career choices. The first author of this paper was a doctoral teaching assistant, who introduced theatre-based pedagogy into the course. The second author is the faculty offering this course to MBA students since 2010.

The guiding philosophy of this course is a social constructionist perspective of careers (Savickas, 2005) which recognizes the career actors' agency in crafting their work experiences, despite social and economic constraints. Therefore, our pedagogy aims to promote critical reflection, self-expression and reflexive career-making in future managers. Introducing Boal's theatre allowed us to push these boundaries further through experiential and embodied engagement in the classroom.

Recently, there is growing appreciation of art-based methods in management education (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009; Katz-Buonincontro, 2015). Theatre, in particular has garnered much interest; and a variety of theatre formats are being used in management education. These include improv games (Moshavi, 2001; Huffaker & West, 2005); role plays (Comer & Vega, 2006); interactive theatre (Boggs, Mickel & Holtom, 2007); and dramaturgy (Leberman & Martin, 2005). Introducing theatre-based activities in the management classroom has been linked to greater student involvement, self-awareness and the awareness of others, learning of new skills and behaviors, exploration of sensitive topics, and experiential learning (Huffaker & West, 2005; Comer & Vega, 2006; Hoggs et al., 2007; Baccarani & Bonfanti, 2016).

Our approach includes, yet extends beyond these benefits by adopting a critical, reflexive pedagogy based in Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" (T.O.) techniques (Boal, 1993, 2002, 2013). T.O. is a community, participatory and emancipatory form of theatre devised by Augusto Boal for working with oppressed populations in Latin America, and later in Europe. It involves working without scripts, with personal issues and shared concerns of a community. The issues or oppressive conditions facing the community are dramatized, followed by an interpretation of the situation and a collective exploration of the possibilities for action. The T.O. approach fosters reflection, reflexivity, critical thinking and dialogue, and can be applied towards a reflexive and critical approach to management education (Bierne and Knight, 2007; Pässilä, Oikarinen and Harmaakorpi, 2015).

However, the application of Boal's theatre techniques in management education is rare. Notable examples involve use of community and applied theatre (based on similar principles) in learning of management concepts (Bierne and Knight, 2007), voicing of customer concerns (Pässilä et al.,2015), and students' experiences of internationalization (Mangan, Kelemen and Moffat, 2016). In these contexts, theatre allowed for reflective and participative learning, sensitive engagement with controversial ideas and tensions, and new ways of interpreting or unsettling perplexed situations (Bierne and Knight, 2007; Pässilä et al.,2015; Mangan et al., 2016). Our paper builds upon these contributions with a reflexive account of introducing Boal in the MBA classroom, through designing and facilitating the "Career Stakeholders exercise". Adapted from Boal's "Cop in the Head" techniques (2002, 2013), this exercise is aimed at

identifying and working with internalized messages and expectations that influence an individual's career decision.

While existing research (discussed above) is based on the use of "image theatre" format and games (Boal, 1993); our approach is based on the "Cop in the head" techniques (Boal, 2013) that were developed in the latter period of his work. The Cop techniques involve enactment of specific situations of internalized oppression or a conflict; with a main character (i.e. the oppressed) and several cops (i.e. internalized oppressors). Community members intervene and participate in the dialogue, allowing the scene to be re-enacted with alternative perspectives and approaches.

While previous scholars have worked with community theatre to examine sensitive and problematic issues in management and organization, we touch upon an exploration of personal, family and intimate relations (Boal, 2013; Burleson, 2003). Further, we use theatre as a "projective" technique to uncover participants' inner thoughts, beliefs and feelings that may not be easily accessible through more conventional methods of learning (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). The aim is to help management students identify, bring to surface and explore messages of multiple stakeholders in their own career decisions.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. First, we explicate the Premise for the introduction of this activity in our course and session. Then, we describe the "Cop in the head" activity within the T.O. repertoire. Further, we discuss our design of the "Career Stakeholders exercise", and how we adapted theatre within our classroom context. After this, we discuss our experiences, outcomes and challenges in facilitating this exercise. In conclusion, we summarize our findings and contributions, and discuss further possibilities of applying Boal's theatre in the management classroom.

The Premise: Career Agents?

The "Career Stakeholders exercise" was developed for our elective course titled, "Personal Values, Goals and Career Options" (PVGCO) offered to full-time MBA students. Based on social constructionist and relational perspectives (Savickas, 2005; Blustein, 2011) in positive and vocational psychology, the aim of this course is to facilitate greater agency and reflexivity amongst students with respect to their careers. Through 3- hour sessions over ten consecutive weeks, students are encouraged to examine their beliefs and assumptions regarding work, success and career choice; identify their unique values, interests and strengths; and address internal and external barriers to crafting their careers with freedom and purpose.

The two main approaches to learning in this course are reflection and dialogue. Every session is designed around a theme and students are assigned relevant readings in preparation for class. In class, we use student presentations and discussions on the session theme to generate dialogue that draws upon the collective and shared experiences of students. This is followed by individual reflection exercises using work-sheets and journals, both in-class and after the session. The completed reflection exercises are typically shared with the facilitator as part of the course requirement and their confidentiality is preserved.

The course involves ongoing efforts by the facilitator(s) towards creating an open, safe and creative environment in the classroom to facilitate personal insight and exchange of ideas and experiences. To create a conducive space for reflection and dialogue, we have previously experimented with approaches such as guided meditation, use of art and video in student presentations, and theatre-based exercises, including image theatre from Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" repertoire (Boal, 2002).

The fifth session of this course is on the theme of "Breaking out of Conformity", to enable students to recognize and address various influences on their career choices. The underlying principle is that careers are negotiated and constructed in interaction with others in the individual's life context (Blustein, 2011). Career decisions and plans involve messages from multiple "stakeholders" (Butler, 2007); significant others in the present, as well as influential figures from childhood including parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers and ancestors (Blustein, 2011). These messages take the form of beliefs, expectations, prescriptions or demands from these stakeholders. Especially when acquired in early childhood, the influence of the messages is unconscious and powerful. Since the stakeholders themselves come from different backgrounds and motivations, the individual is faced with multiple, contradictory voices, leading to confusion and ambivalence about career decisions and/or a feeling of being over-whelmed by expectations (Butler, 2007).

Based on our experience in this course over the years, we have found this to be a prevalent and consistent challenge for our management students. Especially in collectivistic cultures such as India, career is not an individual project, but is negotiated at the level of family and community (Gergen, 2009; Blumstein, 2011). In the current socio-economic environment, much value is attached to educational qualifications from prestigious institutions, particularly in Engineering and Management. These are seen to promise financial security and advancement through employment in large corporations, linked to family prestige and social status (Agarwala, 2008; Saavala, 2010).

The typical demographic of our classroom is students between ages 23- 25, of which 90% are engineers, and 60% men. Students have shared in informal discussions with the facilitator(s), how their career decisions were governed by family and peer pressures. While the course helped them to take ownership of their work experiences, they continued to feel constrained by the people in their lives and unable to consider their own interests and priorities. This confusion was often relevant to their forthcoming career decisions in the wake of campus job placements.

While these were shared problems and dilemmas amongst the student community, we found that their presence was implied and taken-for-granted. Hence, they were rarely explored or addressed in a direct way. Therefore, the premise of our session is that while it is impossible to completely eliminate the influences of "stakeholders", it is possible to address them with greater awareness, to enable greater freedom and authenticity in career choices (Bulter, 2007).

Previously, the format of this session was: readings on the concept of career stakeholders, in-class presentation, and facilitated discussion. This was followed by individual reflection where students identified the stakeholders in their own career decisions, and their respective messages. Finally, students were encouraged to discuss these insights, along with possible strategies to address these messages in the outer world (actual discussions with stakeholders) or in the inner world (working with internalized beliefs).

However, we found students reluctant to discuss these issues or to explore them in sufficient depth to work out potential strategies or solutions. This was evidenced in our observations in class and in the completed reflection work-sheets (Appendix C). During the session, facilitator's questions and gentle probing were often met with uncomfortable silence or generic, impersonal responses. We found resistance and discomfort on part of the students in bringing to the surface challenges with family members, or internal conflicts that resulted from stakeholders' expectations. However, these issues came up consistently in informal conversations with facilitators.

We found that, for a majority of students, the understanding of the session theme was conceptual rather than a reflexive, embodied one (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015) i.e. they were not willing or able to connect the ideas to their real-life situations in a meaningful way. Also, in the absence of dialogue and sharing, there was little understanding of the problem as a shared one. Hence, the opportunity to exchange experiences and insights to arrive at a common repertoire of responses remained unrealised.

Therefore, we needed a methodology that allowed for reflection and dialogue on these issues in a manner where the individual felt safe to let these voices be seen and heard, and to respond to them in a non-judgmental way. Introducing a theatre-based activity drawing upon Boal's "Cop in the head" techniques gave us the opportunity to meet these aims.

Cop in the head

"Cop in the Head" is a set of techniques developed by Augusto Boal within the Theatre of the Oppressed (T.O.) repertoire. T.O. was first developed out of Augusto Boal's work with the Brazilian peasant and worker populations in the 1950s and 60s. It is a form of community education that uses theatre as a tool for transformation, for personal and social change. T.O. envisages theatre as a form of self-expression as well as self-exploration leading to a transforming experience for the actor and the audience (Boal, 2002; Burleson, 2003).

It is a participatory theatre format that bridges the divide between actors and audience. There are no scripts, actors are drawn from within the community and the emphasis is on experiencing the issue at hand- thus there are no spectators, only "spect-actors" (Boal, 1993). Through a system of interactive, carefully structured exercises and games, the objective is for the "spect-actors" to "get out of our minds and into their bodies", break out of old patterns, and "discover their body's potential to teach them about the self and the world" (Boal, 2002).

A typical T.O. structure consists of warm-up- activity- debrief i.e. dramatization followed by interpretation of the experience. The notion of dialogue is ever-present; through the language of theatre, everyone is invited to share their perspectives on a shared issue (Boal, 1993). Thus, T.O. allows for emergence of multiple perspectives, where problems do not have right answers or fixed outcomes (Beirne & Knight, 2007).

While earlier T.O. techniques dealt with external sources of oppression, in his later work around the 1980s, Boal developed a collection of exercises and improvisations designed "to examine individual, internalized oppressions and to place them within the larger [social] context" (Boal, 2013). The "Cop in the Head" represents any type of external messages- social messages, negative self-talk, or peer pressure. These may come from authority figures, institutions, or other individuals including parents, siblings, peers, teachers, or spiritual leaders (Burleson, 2003). Thus, Boal's concept of oppression included "*intimate, familial and societal norms and expectations*" that obstruct individual will and create passivity (Boal, 2013). In some cases, the "cops" could be oppressive forces shared by a particular group as a whole. This resonates with the premise of our session and our students' shared reality. Examples of stakeholders' messages in their context are: "You need to be a winner", "Just follow the herd, don't rock the boat," "Your parents have sacrificed so much for you", "You're just a kid, you don't know what is good for you."

Through "Cop in the head" techniques, these persistent and often disembodied voices i.e. abstract "cops" are identified, investigated, and addressed. Participants are encouraged to examine the impact of social factors on their personal problems, and to initiate change. This happens through processes of "embodiment" and "enactment". In a typical approach to this exercise, an individual recounts a personal experience or a story of internalized oppression or

a conflict. The multiple "cops" within the issue are identified and embodied by spect-actors who position themselves behind the main character. The dispute is then enacted between the main character and cops. During this enactment, other spect-actors may intervene and replace the main character if they feel that their particular perspective or way of speaking will offer an alternative approach or a more effective argument. Thus, the activity moves from the particular to the general, such that the entire group becomes the protagonist in a session (Boal, 2013; Burleson, 2003).

"Cop in the head" techniques are useful to locate the causes of the problem, identify the multiple roles and messages in a particular situation, explore the merits and drawbacks of each message, and to show the individual and group that the problem is socially shared. Based in T.O. philosophy, the main goals are: to understand a situation, and to rehearse actions that can break the oppression in that situation (Boal, 2002).

Career Stakeholders exercise

We refer to our adaptation of "Cop in the head" techniques as the "Career Stakeholders exercise" based on the conceptual background of our session (Butler, 2007). The aim of this exercise is to help management students identify, bring to surface and explore messages of multiple stakeholders in their own career decisions.

We adapted the original "Cops" exercise to our course aims, session format and classroom context. Our main concern was to create a safe space where these voices can be seen and heard, and addressed in a non- judgmental way. As discussed previously, we had experienced our students reluctant to reflect upon or discuss personal challenges with family members, or internal conflicts resulting from their expectations. Therefore, we anticipated their unwillingness to share their personal stories; and to explore their conflicts with others through the "Cops" structure. In a class of 75 students, the "protagonist" sharing details from their life would be put into a particularly vulnerable position. Further, we wanted to run the exercise as part of our regular classroom sessions; incorporating it within our session time and format. Three main points guided us in our adaptation of this exercise: 1) developing a representative case, 2) adopting theatre to our classroom context, 3) creating a space for open dialogue.

Developing a representative case

We developed a case of a representative MBA student based on our experiences with this course, discussions with, and information provided by previous batches of more than 500 students. The case narrates the career dilemma of a relatable protagonist "Rajesh", with typical career stakeholders- family members, peers, romantic partner and professors (Refer to Appendix A). In class, students are asked to read the case and identify the stakeholders and their respective messages.

Case analysis is a familiar teaching method in our classroom context. The case is written in a manner that provides sufficient insight into the motives and messages of stakeholders, but is open enough to allow for interpretation and projection of students' own realities onto the characters and situation (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). We expected that anchoring the exercise in this case would allow the students to interpret the protagonist's situation as an outsider; yet identify with the conflicts and struggles. We use it as a starting point to lead our students into the main theatre-based activity.

Adopting theatre to our classroom context

Based on Boal's notion of "spect-actors", the exercise involves a large group of participants,

in our case, up-to 75 students. We invite students to volunteer themselves for the roles of various characters; the "protagonist" Rajesh and his stakeholders. The space in the front/ center of our classroom serves as the stage for the activity.

In the original "Cops" structure, actors form images with their body, and express their position on the issue in a single phrase or line, incorporating emotion (Boal, 2013). In our version, we refer to these as "signature lines" which represent each stakeholder's message to the protagonist. First, we invite the spect-actors to come up with signature lines for each stakeholder (Refer to Appendix B for examples). Then, we invite the actor playing the part to dramatize this line accompanied by a suitable gesture and/or tone. In doing so, we encourage students to draw upon their own experiences as much as the case material.

Then, we invite suggestions for the protagonist's signature line, as a reaction to the multiple messages. Finally, all actors are invited to dramatize their messages together, to collectively experience the "bombarding" effect of the multiple, contradictory voices on the protagonist. Thus, the dual processes of "embodiment" and "enactment" (Burleson, 2003) unfold on the classroom stage, with involvement and engagement from the spect-actors.

Creating a space for open dialogue

It was important to create an environment of trust and openness for students to work through their personal conflicts. Our intention was to allow for the discovery of career dilemmas as shared concerns within the student community, and dialogue with stakeholders unfolding as a form of "collective voicing" (Pässilä et al., 2015).

In the next step, we invite interaction between the protagonist and the "cops" (Boal, 2013). We start with stakeholders representing strong, opposing voices; again inviting the spect-actors to make this choice. The actors are invited to begin with their signature lines and take the argument forward, remaining true to their character. They are urged to draw upon their personal experiences with similar individuals. Thus, we empower participants to collectively shape the dialogue, and to project their own realities onto the enactment. Then, we invite dialogue between key stakeholders with opposing positions. We allow the protagonist to intervene in the end to address both. Occasionally, we invite spect-actors to intervene in the process, replacing the protagonist to try out different strategies to respond to stakeholders. The process continues till time and/or possibilities of dialogue are exhausted. This is followed by debrief with actors and spect-actors. Students are encouraged to explore their own stakeholders and their internalized messages, and decide which ones they want to retain and reinforce, and which ones they want to let go.

In the classroom, the "Career Stakeholders" exercise unfolds in five sequential steps (over approximately 90 min). The steps and their significance in the design are outlined below.

> *Step 1: Reading a case about a representative MBA student* (5 min)
> Students identify and empathize with the protagonist, see similarities from their own lives, and feel a shared sense of dilemma with each other and the protagonist.
> *Step 2: Discussion in groups of 4 to 5 to identify stakeholders in the case* (10 min)
> This initiates an exploration of the issue in a "safe" manner, as the discussion is about the protagonist (and not them).
> *Step 3: Theatre-based exercise adapted from "Cops"* (45 min)
> Students are invited to play various characters: the "protagonist" and stakeholders, and collectively identify their signature lines. Characters dialogue

with each other, and key conflicts play out, allowing students to engage with the issue in an embodied way, drawing upon personal experiences.

Step 4: Debrief of actors and spect-actors (15 min)

Students are debriefed about their experience; followed by discussion on stakeholders, their roles, and effective responses or strategies. Theoretical inputs are introduced from the recommended reading for the session (Butler, 2007) and the enactment is directly connected to students' own realities.

Step 5: Individual reflection on stakeholders (15 min)

Students are invited to draw upon the exercise and debrief to reflect on stakeholders in their own lives. We provide them with reflection sheets (format in Appendix C) to list out stakeholders, their messages and possible strategies to address them.

Thus, through the five steps of the "Careers Stakeholders exercise", exploration of career dilemmas unfolds as a process of collective sense-making with the actors and spect-actors. Students examine taken-for-granted situations and reimagine possibilities for future thought and action (Cunliffe, 2009; Pascilla et al., 2015). Through embodiment and enactment (Burleson, 2003) of a representative situation, they project their own lived experiences onto the dramatization. The experiential theatre activity helps them to express tacit, embodied learning (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015) i.e. "knowing in the gut", and individual reflection helps crystallize it into "knowing in the head" (Taylor, 2003). Further, they move from "reflection" as a cognitive or intellectual activity, to "reflexivity" which is embodied, experiential and relational (Cunliffe, 2002; Vince and Reynolds, 2009).

Experiences, outcomes and challenges

The "Career stakeholders exercise" was introduced into our course design with the objective of enhancing reflexivity in our students with respect to their careers. This exercise has now been facilitated over fourteen sessions in five years. To understand how this exercise addresses its objectives, we refer to two main sources of data: 1) Facilitator observations and experiences; and 2) Student feedback.

Facilitator observations and experiences

We noted our facilitation experiences in the classroom; and interpreted these through reflection, discussion, and shared "sense-making". During initial runs of the exercise, the first author took on the role of an observer to make detailed step-by-step notes. In subsequent sessions, we noted and discussed novel and/or interesting observations and challenges that emerged during facilitation. These included the stakeholders identified in class, signature lines and dialogue, issues emerging during the debrief, and insights shared during individual reflection.

We decided against documenting the intervention through audio-visual recording and/ or external observers, taking into consideration the privacy and comfort of our participating students. Our data from this source is therefore anecdotal and processual. It gives us valuable insight into how the steps conceptualized in our design actually play out in the classroom.

Some of these insights are outlined below.

In Steps 1 and 2, we have found the students enthusiastic and curious to interpret Rajesh's situation, and willing to draw upon their experiences in doing so. There is animated discussion in groups while identifying stakeholders. Students are able to go beyond the case to identify additional "cops" based on their own lives. In the past, they have mentioned powerful

institutional stakeholders such as financial institutions and social media which exert an influence on their career choices.

In Step 3, we introduce the theatre-based activity i.e. actors embodying the stakeholders and protagonist, and an enactment of the conflicts. In the beginning, we are often faced with a mixture of reluctance, laughter and humor in the classroom. While identifying actors, we have found students apprehensive to volunteer themselves and instead eager to nominate their peers to play various characters. This "selection" is usually on gendered lines, with occasional exceptions. At times, students volunteer to play a stakeholder who is prominent in their own lives. When signature lines are invited from spect-actors, multiple suggestions are thrown in, and there is much noise and humor in the classroom. Over time, we have accepted these as initial responses to a new pedagogy and the psychological risks of participation. We have also noticed that usually, as the exercise continues, students' engagement becomes more meaningful.

As stakeholders are identified and embodied; their motivations, beliefs, and impact on protagonist come alive. In embodying each character through physical gestures and voice; students often draw upon familiar cultural elements such as colloquialism and film dialogues. For instance, a commonly used signature line is: "*Ja beta, Jee le apnee zingagi"* (in Hindi, which translates to "Go child, live your life"), a parental permission to freedom from a popular Bollywood film.

Further, by means of enactment, responses to stakeholder messages are experienced as active strategies rather than abstractions. We have found actors going beyond the stakeholder information in the case, to reveal emotions, expectations and (often surprising) positions of various characters. We have also found spect-actors engaged and responsive to the unfolding dialogue. As the dialogue continues, and emotions and conflicts surface, the atmosphere in the classroom shifts to one of uncomfortable silence.

Usually, time does not permit us to exhaust all possibilities of dialogue or reach a reconciliation. We look for a natural end-point to stop the exercise, when one or more "cops" have softened their stand or the protagonist has come up with satisfactory responses. Occasionally, we prompt the actors not to give up their position easily.

In Step 4, new insight into protagonist's emotions and stakeholders' motivations emerges from the debrief.

We start by asking questions on each stakeholder, addressed to both actors and spect-actors. The actors often reveal the nuances of their characters; their intentions and concerns about the protagonist, and the responses that diminished their resistance. Spect-actors share about moments that emerged as interesting or meaningful in the drama, and discuss effective strategies to dialogue with difficult stakeholders. Students appreciate the impact of contradictory messages and are able to identify messages that are appealing, rational, strong, and oppressive. At this stage, we have found it useful to clarify that a "cop" is not the actual person, but a representation of that person in the protagonist's head i.e. an internalized voice.

In Step 5, we find students quiet and contemplative, as they work through their reflection sheets. We emphasize that each individual faces a unique conflict and a set of stakeholders, whose positions and signature lines may vary. Occasionally, if we hear some discussion, we present the option of reflection in pairs. At this stage, we have found students willing to share personal stories, and to empathize with their peers. We have received thoughtful questions, such as: "Why are cops always assumed to be negative?" "Is it always a good idea to confront family members?" "What if you cannot remember or locate the person behind a powerful

message or belief?"

Based on these insights, we have found students more empowered to address stakeholders in their career decisions and to start actively engaging with them. We have also observed students' creativity and openness to dialogue and self-disclosure extending to the rest of the course. Other researchers have commented on the potential of art-based learning methods to cultivate creativity and empathy amongst management students (Katz-Buonincontro, 2015; Baccarani & Bonfanti, 2016).

As facilitators, our most important concern is to create a non-judgmental, safe environment in our classroom. Our main challenge has been facilitating a theatre-based activity within the session time and classroom space, with 75 participants. Hence, we are not able to include warm-up activities before the main enactment; or spect-actor interventions at the end. However, we remain mindful of the psychological risks for students in self-disclosure, and possibilities of emotional triggers. Our previous experiences and training help us in this regard. The first author is trained in applied theatre techniques including T.O.; whereas the second author is an experienced facilitator of courses on positive psychology, creativity and mindfulness. We allow students to choose how much they wish to share in groups; providing the opportunity for individual reflection. We share examples from our own lives to initiate dialogue. We do not propose any solutions; instead we encourage students to develop their own strategies.

Student reflection and feedback

We invited students' feedback on this exercise, over email, after completion of the course. Their responses were voluntary and directly emailed to the facilitator. The student feedback received is largely positive. There are formal mechanisms in place at our institution to collect anonymous student feedback and ratings of the entire course. However, our intent was to seek detailed, qualitative feedback on this particular exercise, and to understand students' experiences in their own words. The lack of anonymity is a potential limitation of our method. Although course requirements and evaluation were completed by this time, we concede that familiarity and authority in the student-faculty relationship may inhibit negative feedback.

In addition, we continued to receive requests for informal discussions after the sessions, on personal concerns and experiences of the students. The insights from these conversations and email responses are summarized below.

First, students have found the case extremely relatable, and easy to connect with their lives. They were able to appreciate Rajesh's situation as a representation of their stories; and approach its interpretation in a non-judgemental manner.

> *I personally thought the simple no-frills language used to write the case was the most powerful mark of the exercise that could have been employed to drive the facts home- it was so simply written that I could focus entirely on what was happening, instead of getting lost in convoluted arguments of good-bad, right-wrong. That part- the onus of the inference was entirely on us. And I vaguely remember- most of us read the story in the backdrop of our own lives, coloured by our own past experiences and social conditioning. Maybe the story will change for people from different cultures and countries, but I think it's safe to assume that an Indian MBA class setting has a fairly homogeneous crowd or at the very least, a conformist crowd even if we're all very different people outside the Institute.*

Further, they were able to understand the concept of "stakeholder" in a reflexive way, and to apprehend the impact of various stakeholders on their own career decisions. They were also able to reflect on their own needs and motivations, such as need for approval, and social conditioning within their cultural contexts.

> *I would like to share a few points that I felt while doing the exercise in the class. I could completely relate my situation with the same. When I tried leaving my previous job or join MBA or choose particular electives or make any other life decisions, be it personal or professional there were so many people involved in that decision making process. I used to think it's maybe because we care about so many people that make us bring them into the process. We also care about what others perceive of us. Whether they approve of our decisions. I have made so many decisions in my life just to please others and not because I liked them. Doing this exercise will make us the realize about how to weigh in the importance of each stakeholder into our decision and weed out the unimportant ones.*

Additionally, some students reported insights into internalized messages and beliefs formed during early childhood, and their continued influence later in life. They were able to surface their internal conflicts, identify and separate the stakeholder voices in their current decisions. This was also apparent in the "My Key Stakeholders" and "Their Voices" sections of their completed reflection work-sheets (format in Appendix C).

> *There are three insights I got from doing the stakeholder exercise:*
> *a. I realized most of the thoughts in minds were not even mine. They have been conditioned into my mind for years by others (i.e. stakeholders) I started thinking them as my own thoughts even though they were not. Example-(Real life) For long time in my childhood, my parents used to say I am not that bright but every-thing I achieve is because of sheer hard work and willpower. This I am sure came from a very good place in their heart and had no hint of malice in it, but in turn it always led (me) to believe I was not a very bright student in-spite getting good results.*
> *b. Since I was always raised (like most Indians) to take a decision that made maximum number of stakeholders happy , it became the compass that decided the direction of my life. If maximum number of stakeholders said "engineering", then sure engineering it became. Years later when I look back and see, I feel sad for that boy who believed his happiness lies in maximizing the stakeholders' happiness.*
> *c. Most of the inner turmoil that happens in making the life decisions happens due to various stakeholders' forces acting on us from different directions pulling us in all opposite directions. This happens a lot at the back of our mind without many of us being consciously aware of the process. The most simple solution to those dilemmas (that I found effective) is sketching those stakeholders forces and then letting your "gut" decide. This is my biggest takeaway from the exercise. More often than not we will be happy with that decision even we fumble later on.*

For other students, the strategies learnt through this exercise proved useful in career decisions during campus placements. They felt empowered to address the influence of various stakeholders, and a greater sense of agency and autonomy in making their choices.

> *I did find the "stakeholder" exercise to be very useful albeit with retrospective effect. I had undertaken the course in Term IV but I must say that I realised*

the true meaning of that exercise during the "final placements" schedule after Term VI. So, here goes my testimonial for the exercise: While the "stakeholder" exercise performed in the PVGCO course had elements of drama thrown into it, I personally found it to be very useful when analyzing its meaning vis-a-vis happenings in my life. During the final placements, I distinctly recall the voices of various stakeholders in my life while appearing in different interviews. I must say that having experienced such a situation beforehand (through this session), I could tackle it tenaciously by devising my own methods for dealing with each of those stakeholders. The exercise though simple had deep underlying practicable insights.

Our most important learning from this data was the diversity of students' individual experiences underlying their shared concerns. Their unique life situations influenced their experience with, response to, and the impact of this exercise. Some students approached us to gain perspective on a particularly difficult stakeholder, while others reported developing greater empathy and comfort in relationships with their family members. We discovered how financial pressures or social status played a role in stakeholders' expectations; for instance: some students hailed from small towns where securing admission into a management program was linked to family prestige. We also discovered that female students identified with Rajesh's situation but also with his "stake-holder" girl-friend; as their career choices were complicated by societal pressures of marriage.

Conclusion

This paper is our account of using Boal's theatre in the MBA classroom towards enhanced reflection, reflexivity and dialogue. We apply principles of T.O., using theatre as a projective technique to surface students' thoughts and feelings (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009) and explore personal experience (Springborg, 2012); thus facilitating embodied learning in the management classroom (Küpers & Pauleen, 2015).

The aims of the "Career stakeholders exercise" are to: (1) make students aware of stakeholders in their lives and (2) empower them to address their messages. Through this exercise, we facilitate collective examination of shared lived experiences of being a young career actor in the contemporary work culture amidst a network of relationships, discourses and perspectives. Participants draw upon their own history, and reveal themselves through a process of "mutual self-disclosure" (Boal, 1979; Bierne & Knight, 2007). The complex of multiple roles, perspectives, and voices that operate within the issue of career choice are explored, using theatre as a language.

Our facilitation experiences and student responses show that future managers are able to recognize influences and constraints on their career decisions (past and present), surface internal conflicts with respect to stakeholder expectations, and arrive at strategies to respond to these influences. In line with our larger course aims, students feel a greater sense of agency and autonomy with respect to their careers.

The "Career Stakeholders exercise" can be used in courses or workshops on career planning or design; and easily adapted to particular session formats and goals. The concept of "stakeholders" is intuitive and easy to grasp, and can be introduced in class or as pre-read. Facilitators of smaller groups may involve participants in constructing the case, based on their own stories. Where conducive, warm-up activities can be introduced before the main theatre activity; drawing upon T.O. repertoire of games (Boal, 1993). Further, the format of this exercise can be used in other management courses to explore intra-personal conflicts,

negotiations or shared issues of the student community, with the aim of collective reflection and dialogue.

We believe that adopting Boal's theatre in the management classroom provides for a participatory learning process based in experiences and concerns of students; and has the potential to bring in a more critical, reflexive approach to management education.

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Appendix A: Representative Case

Rajesh is a student at a top management institute in the country. Just about to finish his MBA, he looks forward to his placements with anticipation as well as apprehension. He wants to make his family proud, and fulfill the expectations of the important people in his life.

Rajesh hails from a middle class family - his father was in Government service and has worked hard all his life to save for his children's education. His mother is a school-teacher and a devoted homemaker. Rajesh knows that his parents have sacrificed a lot to raise their children and educate them well. It is only natural that his Father wants to see him settled in a secure job with a reputed company.

Like Rajesh, his older brother Shantanu is an engineer. He went on to the US for his Masters and now has a well-paying job there. Rajesh did not feel interested in the technical field, hence decided that management was best for him. However, his older brother insists that Raj follow in his footsteps and migrate to the States for a better life.

Rajesh feels differently about this, as he wants to be near his mother and grand-mother, whom he is deeply attached to. It was his grand-mother who brought him up in his younger days, when his mother was busy with her school. She told him stories of young heroes who achieved great things. "One day you will also grow up and become a hero…" she would say fondly to 5-year old Raj.

Raj always got good grades through his school and college years. His Father was a disciplinarian, so it was best to study hard and avoid the angry confrontations if he came home with a poor report card. Mother was more easy-going about marks- she believed that learning and human values were more important. "Be a good person, Raj. Do good to the world." "These ideals are good, but don't work in the real world." Father was usually quick to add.

Raj's Uncle Promod was the exact opposite of his Father. At a young age, he had run away from home to become an actor. He had struggled for years and now did small parts in theatre and television. He didn't come by that often, sensing his older brother's disapproval. "Loser, never worked hard. If you don't study, you'll become like him." Father would often remark. Raj often thought that it didn't seem like such a bad proposition, considering how carefree and happy Uncle looked.

He liked people like that- energetic and full of life. That quality drew him to Radhika when they met in the first term of MBA; and of course she was really pretty! For the past year and half, she had been a supportive girl-friend, encouraging Raj to believe in himself. He was lucky to have her. However, the stress of placements was getting to her as well and she no longer had time or inclination to motivate him. She often brought up the topic of marriage, and the importance of landing jobs in a common location to make their relationship work.

Thinking about this makes Rajesh confused and uneasy- so he prefers to go about his activities and follow whatever his class-mates do. Off late, he hears people saying "follow your passion', "do what you love'- professors, best-selling authors, friends. This adds to his confusion. He wonders what is his role amidst all the stakeholders in his life.

Appendix B: Examples of Signature lines

Rajesh's Stakeholders	Signature Lines
Father	Work hard or you will fail
Mother	Be a good person, do good to others
Grandmother	You are a Hero!
Brother	Come to the U.S. – that's where life is!
Uncle	Just chill in life!
Girlfriend	Let's get married soon
Books	Follow your passion

Appendix C: Individual Reflection Worksheet

My Key Stakeholders	Their Voices (Signature lines)	My Possible Responses /Reflections

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