

## **Review of “Who Needs Bollywood?”**

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In “Who needs Bollywood” we have a story of adventure, one where an instructor striving to really enrich their (business) students’ lives through exposing them to new experiences and ideas does indeed enable and unleash that potentiality. And it’s delightful and inspiring what is experienced, what is opened up, what is explored. But all this hope and care and beauty and energy is then crushed, destroyed by the traditions and conventions of the academy, by managerialist and functionalist concerns and demands. Yes, I recognise this scene. I have had a bit part to play in this beautiful but brutal game.

But let’s deal with the adventure first, as perhaps doing so gives us strength to face the challenge that is coming. Ushered outside the classroom the students (ethnographically) encounter Bollywood. It is a place to watch the pretty girls, to dance and sing, to talk with the actors about work that seems more like play. For the students this seems a glamorous, exciting place. Here there is space and time for artistic expression, for a different way of being in the world. All this is opened up as an exploration of contemporary organization. Anything and everything becomes possible as the students are seduced by this experience (and the pretty girls?), are awoken to new possibilities, and new perspectives. Perhaps they come to imagine themselves having lives that are quite different from those that are normally expected of B-School graduates, one where feeling free, powerful and viscerally connected to the moment-by-moment construction of organisation – as an artful, heartfelt, always fragile, community effort – becomes possible.

Teaching that has an impact becomes happenstance in this space, although really, when is it ever not? It arises in the moment, off the cuff. It demands intense attention to what is present right now, and what it might become, if only we intervene with a provocative question, an insightful observation. It happens in an actual place of work, albeit one where “work” and “play” are no strangers to each other. The students learn what they will, damn it, irrespective of what The Curriculum demands of them.

There are no safety measures here either; no PowerPoints waiting in reserve to fill up 50 minutes should the discussion not take off as per “the plan”. Indeed it seems there is no planning here, at least not in the sense recognised by the canon of management thought and the conventions of business education. But there is clearly much by way of intent, purpose and design. It’s not “anything goes”. But it is “anything is possible”. It is so much more than what the plan, the canon, the conventions and The Curriculum can offer.

But you know what is coming, don’t you. “Management” is coming. “Business education”, “the canon” (or, the cannon?), The Curriculum are coming. These demand a clear return on

investment. There is an expectation of tangible, practical outputs. There is to be order and facts – and these will destroy the vibrantly chaotic and the joyful. A commercial logic is to be forced upon this mode of being, to colonise and rule over this world of adventure, to impose its disciplines of planning, organizing, leading and controlling. What “Management” and its companions want is something more akin to death than to life. This is achieved through processes of colonisation, of subjugation to its will. It cannot, it will not, recognise forms of life other than those it defines and prescribes.

So, all that was opened up has now been shut down again. The adventure has ended. The old routines have been resumed, ones that we all recognise, could easily slot ourselves into with a minimum of effort. This time, there was no other option but to retreat. As with any battle there are casualties, there are wounds. The pain will ease somewhat with time: this much I know, this small comfort I can offer. And remember the students. Remember their faces, what they said, how they looked, how they learned, how they engaged with life. They won’t forget what happened. Bear witness to all that.

What we need most, it seems from this, is a new, different language; one that resonates more deeply than what “Management” and its fellow travellers can offer; one that cuts through and cuts down its pretensions to know best what is true, what is real and what is good. Yes, it seems I do want to inflict a violence upon “Management” with my words, to extract some revenge for the harm that has been done here ... and there, and pretty much everywhere I care to look. In building this new language, then, let “Bollywood” be a code-word, one that reminds us of a magical, wondrous place that once existed and to which we each can seek to return if we only but try. Go forth. Prosper not, but flourish do. Oops, that’s *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* that are also along for the ride.