



# Preparing for Uncertainty: Paradoxical Challenges for Management Education

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# Consider the following...

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- Look before you leap.
- He who hesitates is lost.
- Planning is essential.  
Plans are worthless.

- Is strategic planning essential, but the plan itself worthless?
- Do we have time to plan or does time spent planning represent missed opportunity?
- How would we address this paradox in the classroom?



# Paradox

<b>Paradox</b>	<b>Business Context</b>	<b>Management Education Context</b>
Globalization vs Localization	How does an international company decide where to establish its headquarters?	Separate international business curriculum or interwoven throughout?
Reduced Variation vs Customization	Quality = reduced variation Customization = mass variation	How should we teach multiple sections – same teacher? Different teacher?
Big Enterprise vs Small Business	Is bigger better?	Are we biased towards big business in our examples and applications?
Silos vs Enterprise Perspective	Should the org structure align with functional silos or cross-functional core processes?	How do we develop functional knowledge and cross-functional perspectives?



# Improvisational Theatre embraces Paradox

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- Simultaneously chaotic yet structured
- Planned yet completely unscripted
- No experts – all are experts
- Foundation of building (Yes, and)
- Begins with a base of tenets and practice followed by “being in the moment”
- *Process of improvisation can be learned, but it must be grounded in both improvisational skills and substantive skills of the particular trade. (Crossan et al. 1996)*



# Bringing Improv to Management Education

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- Substantive skills of the particular trade
  - Subject matter – e.g. functional expertise
- Process skills
  - Listening, communication, coaching, time management
  - In order to build, you must first hear!
- Routines, values, a mission statement, or strategy (the offer)
- Practice
  - Cases
  - Projects
  - “games” and “exercises” to encourage out-of-the-box thinking
  - Suspend critical judgment



# In Summary

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- *Management education that engages with contradictions, shadow sides and tensions is important as it assists students to understand the nature of [the subject] itself and the ambiguous work environment in which it is enacted. (Lips-Wiersma, 2004).*
- Our students will face paradox both in the classroom and in the world around them
- We face paradox in the delivery of business education
- Tools are needed to embrace paradox
  - Comfortable with uncertainty
- Improvisational approaches
  - Grounded in paradox
  - Provide both structure (planning) and flexibility (plans are useless)