

## The Pea Project

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A proposal for a whole of conference interactive experience including a 60-90 minute workshop.

## The Art of Management and Organization

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## The Pea Project

A proposal for a whole of conference interactive experience including a 60-90 minute workshop.

Operating from symbolic constructivist (Barry, 1996) and phenomenological (Bachelard, 1964, Dastur, 2000, Brearley 2001) perspectives, the Pea Project combines elements that are unexpected and unanticipated in a management education context, with outcomes that are fundamental to the practice of management.

The elements include photographic 'data' that is created and exhibited at the conference; phenomenological encounters with, and responses to, this photographic 'data'; and 'responses to the responses', emulating the layering and meta awareness of reflective entries in a personal journal. Photography, contemporary art and reflective practices become part of the same generative stock.

The Pea Project subtly and persistently demands that we venture beyond what we already know and understand, opening up and creating space for deep learning. This kind of thinking builds on the work of a broad range of management and traditional educators. (Bilimoria 2000, Grumet 1991, Gunter 1995, hooks 1994, Eisner 1995, Giroux 1989, Jipson and Paley, 1997).

The Pea Project involves the adaptation of a series of successful and innovative teaching and learning practices that have had a significant, sometimes profound, effect on students. What begins with a rather bizarre, some might say eccentric, encounter with a pea develops into a deeply reflective experience. It is expected that the Pea Project will consist of a number of complementary elements over the course of the conference. It is anticipated that these elements will generate participative elaboration and discussion of the themes that emerge.

Ideally the Pea Project would ‘operate’ over each of the three days of the conference, requiring one formal session on the second day;

- **day one** photographs and data collection;
- **day two** 60-90 minute experiential workshop;
- **day three** display of images and postcard responses.

We propose to experientially share with participants our innovative methods for stimulating phenomenological awareness, initiating and deepening reflective practices (Kolb 1984, Schon 1983, 1987, Collier 1999). We regard awareness and reflectiveness as foundational traits in developing and preparing managers for what Lewis (2000) calls “organizational complexity and ambiguity”.

At another level, we consider the process and outcomes of the Pea Project to be contemporary art – a work where the project participants become co-creators. France Morin (2000, p.7) suggests “that artists have the capacity to make a lasting positive impact on peoples lives by helping them to see for themselves the dignity, beauty, and sacredness of the activities of their everyday life: the creative spirit, a powerful agent of transformation, that lies within everyone.” The Pea Project aims to evoke this “creative spirit” in each and every participant.

### The Pea Project – Detailed Description

At the earliest opportunity we propose to introduce ourselves, person by person, to as many of the conference attendees as we can manage. At this time we will ask our fellow attendees to take part in a reflective learning exercise. We will ask each person to take a fresh pea from a pod and to hold the pea in their hand while we take a digital photograph of their hand. In keeping with Bachelard’s (1964, xii) view that “the communicability of an unusual image is a fact of great ontological significance”, the participant’s own hand holding a green pea becomes the focus of attention. A gentle light is directed toward one’s self.

Each participant will also receive a postcard on the cover of which will be a previously photographed hand, holding a pea. On the back of the card will be two questions, "What did you see?", "What is going on here?", and space for participants to respond to these questions. Participants will be asked to place the completed card in a box, which will be prominently displayed at the conference venue.



The photographs and the completed cards will form part of the data for presentation and discussion at the subsequent workshop. Following the workshop the photographs and completed cards will be displayed for the conference participants to view, read and 'mull over'. A second postcard will be available for participants to respond to the collection, and the approach adopted. These cards will be attached to a display board, creating a kind of living, dynamic research form, emulating the layering and meta awareness of reflective entries in a personal journal. People may respond as often as they want - as ideas or thoughts occur to them.

It is anticipated that the Pea Project Workshop will be attended by many of the people who have had their hand photographed - a sense of personal engagement in the project (not to mention intrigue) should be felt by these participants.

The first part of the workshop will be presented in darkness, with a PowerPoint presentation of the many hands and peas. Each hand and pea will be the focus of attention for a few seconds. This will be followed by a quicker projection of the images to promote a sense of the hands as a collective and to establish a sense of diversity and difference. Participants will see their own hand in this procession of hands. Some participants are expected to experience a sense of reverie, others may see their hand as if for the first time or become aware of the shape of their own perception. (Weschler 1982)

At the end of the PowerPoint presentation, with the lights back on, participants will be asked to reflect on the process, of which they have been part, and to again respond to the two simple questions "What did you see?" and "What is going on here?" The combination of the quiet, darkened room and the call for reflection is anticipated to create a deeply thoughtful personal space.

This approach should create the conditions necessary for sharing experiences and personal responses to the combination of the hand, the pea and also the approach adopted. It is these responses that become the focus of discussion in the workshop. If past experiences are a guide then participants will draw out rich and evocative responses from each other. In a teaching and learning setting participants experience a range of responses that are as diverse as the hands depicted. Because everyone starts from an equally obscure and ambiguous place, outside the "rubber stamps of conventional clichés" (Schachtel, 1959, p.288), responses tend to reflect the unique qualities, interests and experiences of the respondents.

The combination of pea and hand, in particular the personal experience of being engaged in the process, stimulates multiple points of departure with shifts in figure-ground relationships and the emergence of personal projections. The material thus generated and recorded can act as a further stimulus to deeply self-reflective loops of engagement. Personal responses to the pea and hand encounter are expected to persist beyond the boundaries of the conference, opening up "zones of possibility for intellect and imagination." (Jipson and Paley 1997)

When the images and responses are displayed as a 'collection' it becomes possible to see a diversity of ideas as well as common themes and overlaps in ways of seeing. The responses of others may also set off a further round of reflective engagement.

If the 'quality' of images captured are consistent with previous efforts the collection of hands will be aesthetically pleasing - the images, particularly when projected, will be visually arresting and quite mesmerizing. Valerie Cassell (2000), curator and director of the visiting Artists Program at the School of the Art Institute Chicago believes “that contemporary art has the potential to play an integral role in society by opening up spaces in which individuals may reexamine their own lives and their relationship to the world.” For this reason, space permitting, we propose to continuously project the images captured in a preset sequence, in an automated PowerPoint presentation in a darkened room at the conference venue. Those attendees who have not been part of other aspects of the Pea Project will at least have some sense of the initial presentation.

The PowerPoint presentation, and suitably adapted supporting material, can also be made available from the conference website to broaden the reach of the experience to practitioners unable to attend the conference.

We believe that it is not merely a matter of colleagues having an opportunity to copy or adapt the Pea Project for their own use but rather the shared experience will inspire further thinking around teaching practices that promote awareness and initiate and deepen reflective practices.

The Pea Project is endlessly extensible with many potential points of departure. We are sure others will adapt the idea of using digital images, postcards and simple everyday objects in ways we can barely imagine. The Pea Project is expected to stimulate interest and intrigue from the beginning of the conference and sustain animated engagement and discussion throughout.

## Abstract

### The 'X' Project

The 'X' project is an experiential exercise that is directed toward the development of phenomenological awareness and reflective practice in managers.

The value of 'X' in the context of a management conference is unknown.

'X' makes no sense, at first.

*"In the course of later childhood, adolescence, and adult life, perception and experience themselves develop increasingly into the rubber stamps of conventional clichés. The capacity to see and feel what is there gives way to the tendency to see and feel what one expects to see and feel, which, in turn, is what one is expected to see and feel because everybody else does." (Schachtel 1959, p.288)*

What will you make of 'X'?

The element of mystery, surprise and unexpectedness is central to the effective unfolding of the Pea Project - so although the abstract is very abstract we ask you to accommodate our eccentricity by agreeing not to give too much away.

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## Planning Details

### Proposed audience

The Pea Project has sufficient depth and conceptual/philosophical layering to engage new faculty and experienced educators alike. More experienced teachers will draw out the underlying constructivist and phenomenological nuances whereas less experienced members of faculty will be drawn into the reflective process.

New members of faculty will benefit from the insights and responses of more experienced conference participants.

### Maximum number of participants

The Pea Project readily scales up to accommodate large groups – it is quite feasible to include all of the conference participants - and will work with as few as eight or ten people.

### Type of session

Ideally the Pea Project would operate over three days;

- **day one** photographs and data collection;
- **day two** a 60-90 minute experiential workshop;
- following workshop a continuous PowerPoint presentation of images in a darkened tutorial size room set aside for that purpose;
- **day three** display of images and postcard responses on a large display board.

### Optimum time required

60-90 minutes depending on the size of the group; if the group is very small (8-15) then 30-45 minutes may also be possible.

### Special requirements

#### Strongly prefer a room that can be darkened

Data projector that can be connected to laptop computer

Screen

Access to a color printer