



The Corporate Jester

What value can “contemporary jesters” bring to your organization?

What topics can be ideally covered with this type of intervention?

How do we work to deliver this intervention?

Why “contemporary jesters” in the corporate world?

What are the resources?



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What value can “contemporary jesters” bring to your organization?

Results of the tested interventions since 2011 reveal that contemporary jesters generate the following impacts in organizations:

- **Spice up your conferences and seminars** with innovative approach using play, improvisation, analogies, mime, physical theatre, comedy, derision & absurd humor, **stimulating self reflection and suggesting different ways of looking at things**.
- Raise awareness of **existing patterns, behaviors and habits** in a **non-traditional** way.
- Bring across **key messages**, even on sensitive topics, in a light hearted yet **memorable** manner
- Generate a **sense of togetherness, connecting people** around the common issues **without blame, motivating** them to work together in the same direction.
- **Demystify issues, complex or sensitive topics** with a **non aggressive** humoristic way.
- Raise awareness of **existing defense mechanism** and stimulate readiness to **change of behaviors**,

What topics can be ideally covered with these interventions?

- Any topic of conference bringing experts to share knowledge & reflect together around particular issues
- Any rules, process, procedures, regulations that should already be known by the participants and does not seem to be respected
- Any behavior that is understood “in theory” but may not be “espoused” in reality
- Any adaptive challenge that has already been approached in a technical manner without 100% results.
- Any recurrent issue where the behaviors and mindsets need to be shifted for its resolution in long term.

How do we work to deliver these interventions?

Each intervention is different and varies based on the target group and on the location and set up of each conference/seminar or meeting. Ideally, to deliver a qualitative intervention, we follow 4 steps:

1- Needs analysis & data collection on the topic & the target group (objectives, needs, culture, behaviors, challenges, constraints, beliefs, patterns, slang, etc). This can be done via individual interviews of the speakers and by sitting in a session to observe in a conference or in a meeting.

2- Design of a tailor made humoristic intervention in line with the data collected.

3- Deliver a series of 10 to 15 min sessions at the beginning or at the end of your conference/meeting sessions in which the corporate jester embodies the company culture, patterns and key behaviors with humility & humanity allowing the audience to identify self and question self about the topics covered.

4- Subsequent review encourages people to express their views & reactions to the play, engaging them in resolving the identified challenges embodied in the play.



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Why “contemporary jesters” in the corporate world?

(Extracts of AZck research in response to the question: What can Mr Leader learn from Mr Clown and how? - Oxford Saïd Business School & HEC Paris – 2011).

Comic actors in Antiquity, court jesters in Middle Age & Renaissance, clowns or bouffon in modern times, “fools are everywhere” across history and “do not belong to particular times or place” (Otto, 2001).

AZck literature review reveals that fools have been playing 5 key functions over times :

- 1- mirroring the reality, telling the truth and promoting self reflection.
- 2- mediating, interpreting and clarifying things between different worlds
- 3- connecting and bounding people around common challenges & facilitating communication.
- 4- influencing decisions by showing the big picture & possible alternatives to status quo.
- 5- entertaining, distracting, energizing, cheering up & freeing up tension, turning down temperature in conflicts

Besides, AZck has been trying to understand the reason and impact of consultants who tell to people what they already know about their organization in current times. A psychoanalytical interpretation of the process & impact of organizational diagnosis (Diamond in the Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 2008) reveals that the consultant who summarizes and communicates the collective narrative of an organization to its members allows to build the bridge between the conscious & the unconscious, encouraging people to acknowledge reality and to take actions towards change.

By comparing clowns through history with these consultants, it seems they have one goal in common, to raise acceptance of reality and readiness to change. To succeed, they demonstrate similar skills (such as for example listening, observation, capacity to look at big picture & step back) but they do not use same techniques to share their observations back to the audience. While most consultants tend to use conventional approaches to present their findings with power point or equivalent technology, jesters use “play” and humor to mirror the observed patterns & challenge the status quo.

Based on these findings, AZck developed an adaptive approach bringing contemporary court jesters, together with coach or consultants into organizations, with the ambition to stimulate learning and encourage the recipients of change by acting out the rituals, patterns and behaviors observed, with humoristic yet non aggressive interventions.

This new type of change agency, aims at supporting existing L&D and change practices, and has been tested by AZck in various organizational settings in Europe and in the US since 2011 (seminar, training course, forum and in the context of a reorganization). Feedback revealed that these interventions generate similar impact as the jesters over times – referring to the above 5 functions.

In the context of learning & change, the clown performance seems to cultivate “aha moments” and “positive insights”, needed to overcome the natural resistance to change and give space to new pathways in our brains (Rock & Schwartz, neuroscience, 2006). Nevertheless sharing an authentic view of the reality does not seem to be enough to drive change of behaviors in long term. Diamond and other learning & change practitioners, such as Argyris & Schön (double loop learning, 1978), Amato & Amado (transitional change, 2001), Heifetz (adaptive leadership, 2001), indicate subsequent review & reflection as a crucial part of learning. Therefore, AZck adaptive approach recommend a debriefing session led by the chair of the conference with the participants to share their thoughts, reflect on their reactions to the performance, discuss about the underlying assumptions of their habits and collectively address the identified challenges with openness and positivism.

(*unthought known= unconscious thoughts and feelings that are known but not thought or communicated to oneself or others in any meaningful form”)



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What are the resources?

Annick Zinck

The consultant / coach

Annick studied Business and Administration in France, passed the CPA (Certified Public Accountant) in the US in 2001, the PMP (Project Management Professional certificate) in 2007. In her quest for continuing education, she completed an international executive Master of Science in "Coaching & Consulting for Change" at HEC Paris & Oxford Saïd Business School in 2011 and an international executive program on the Art & Practice of Leadership development at Harvard in 2012.

She started her career 22 years ago with PricewaterhouseCoopers first as an auditor and then as management consultant leading international transformation programs. After 8 years with PwC, she set up her own learning & development company to design and deliver programs for individuals and teams to develop and grow in the areas of self awareness, leadership, teamwork effectiveness and change management. Her facilitation style is described by her clients as dynamic, motivating and innovative while the learning is transferable in the working place.

The artist

In parallel to the corporate world in which she performs as a consultant & coach, Annick has continuously been developing her own clown character, in international and local workshops with the great support of Jango Edwards, Alain Gautré, Martine Bühner, Alexandre Bordier, Guerassim Dichliev (former assistant of Marcel Marceau) and Kevin Crawford (Roy Hart Theatre company), Rebecca Bonvin in Geneva.

Over the past 13 years, she has been developing and performing with her clown character called "Margret de la Couette" who links the heart & the mind with humor in seminars, trainings, conferences, meetings, webcasts, corporate events.

Context of past corporate clown performances

- Positive Deviance Congress – Copenhagen - 2016
- Conference on the "Unknown" – Budapest – 2016
- Alumni event of Adaptive Leadership Network at Harvard Kennedy School – Oct 2015
- Wine comedy – as part of a wine tasting in Alsace – June 2013
- Virtual regatta – as part of the Vendée Globe virtual regatta daily news – Dec 2012
- Chanel – as part of a seminar organized by He2Be Lausanne – Nice 2010
- As part of the audit process of a hospital under restructuring in the US – Nov 2010

