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Submission: Comedy workshop - Developing leaders through Standup Comedy

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### **Proposal for Comedy Workshop**

I propose a standup comedy workshop at the *2023 International Studying Leadership Conference* with the aim of providing teachers and researchers the opportunity to explore how standup comedy can contribute to their personal and professional growth. Standup comedy workshops hold the promise of deepening leaders' self-awareness, refining their communication prowess, and fostering greater confidence and self-worth. The assessment of standup comedy's benefits for leaders is informed by academic literature on humor and leadership, vertical leadership development concepts, insights gleaned from a study focused on a nonprofit organization, the Armed Service Arts Partnership (ASAP), and the researcher's personal experience encompassing learning, teaching, and performing stand-up comedy. Embracing comedy workshops as a mechanism for leadership development not only possesses the capacity to amplify the attributes of individual leaders, but also, with careful consideration (Brooks, 1992), equips them to effectively employ humor and artistic activities in motivating and guiding their teams within the organizational context.

### **Vertical leadership development**

A leadership-oriented comedy workshop provides all three conditions for vertical development for leaders: Heat Experiences, Colliding Perspectives, and Elevated Sensemaking (Petrie, n.d.). Standup comedy provides the "heat" of a new way of thinking about oneself and their situations. Through the thinking required in the workshop, participants' minds start to open and search for new and better ways to make sense of their challenge to write funny jokes, thus providing a heat experience to disrupt their normal way of thinking. By exploring comedy in a group setting with personal sharing and discussions, the "colliding perspectives" are created. Colliding perspectives "are meant to expose people to different worldviews, opinions, backgrounds, and training," (Petrie, n.d.). Engaging in comedic conversations that encompass diverse viewpoints disrupts the participants' pre-existing mental constructs, broadening the array of perspectives through which they perceive the world. (Petrie, n.d.). The integration and "elevated sensemaking" occurs through reflection at the end of the workshop and follow-on conversations to make sense of their comedy experience. Ideally, a workshop has a follow-on session or feedback mechanism that allows participants to process and share how the workshop impacted them.

### **The Workshop**

A leadership-oriented comedic workshop encompasses a series of structured activities that encourage participants to engage in both individual introspection and group discussions, thereby facilitating personal development and a sense of community. The workshop begins with providing content guidelines and participant expectations. Subsequently, the participants form small groups to kickstart initial interactions. Within these smaller groups, participants engage in thought and discussion on their views on comedy. The subsequent instructional segment teaches brainstorming tactics, which allow participants to expand on their various identities, roles, and aspects of their life for which they may find humor. After brainstorming, the structure of a joke is revealed, which is the formula for making an audience laugh. Example jokes are analyzed and participants begin to see the

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pattern that gives jokes their “punch.” Participants are given the opportunity to experiment with crafting their own jokes, while getting feedback from the instructor and their group members and reworking their content. The interactive process culminates in performing their joke to the group, should they desire.

**Outcomes and Benefits**

Standup comedy workshops and courses have been shown to have a variety of benefits and transferable skills for the participant, including enhancing integration of self and enhancing developing communication skills. As demonstrated by ASAP’s Program Impact Evaluation, (n.d.) adult participation in programs related to humor and the arts has demonstrated the capacity to foster social connections, acquire transferable skills, and cultivate a sense of meaning. Standup comedy lessons may help people engage in meaningful discussions about viewpoints and interpersonal biases in a playful and safe environment (Chin et al., 2022). In terms of directly impacting leadership skills, stand-up comedy has the potential to help leaders “Read the Room” and “Read Themselves,” thereby enhancing their capacity for attending to the needs of others within the organization (Chin et al., 2022).

**Closing**

Standup comedy is an artform that offers a unique avenue for practicing playful, analytical thinking, reflection, and communication within a creative environment. I would be very excited to host a standup comedy workshop at the *2023 International Studying Leadership Conference* in Copenhagen. I am eager to provide an engaging and respectful comedy workshop that will allow me to gather insights on how this unique experience resonates across different contexts and among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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