

Universitetspladsen

RUglobal

Information and debate from Roskilde University

Number 06 · 12. December 2011 – 2. January 2012

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Publishing information

RUCnyt/RUGlobal is Roskilde University's official magazine for information and debate about the organization of the university. RUGlobal is open to all employees and students at Roskilde University to debate the educational and research organizations at the university, including questioning of common interest for research and education.

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Cover photo:

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Layout, print and edition:

PrinfoParitas Digital Service, 1700 copies

Paper:

Cover: 4CC 250g.
Contents: Image Business 80g.

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Opening hours: RUCnyt/RUGlobal does not have any regular office hours. To get in contact with the editorial staff please e-mail us or contact the information office, which is located in building 04.1.

Articles: need to be handed in by e-mail. Please enclose suggestions for illustrations. Discs and other material are normally not returned. The editorial staff is allowed to shorten articles and to reject articles which are not of common interest. Articles of more than 8000 characters (about 2 pages) can normally not be expected to be published un-shortened. There is no minimum length for an article to be published. Anonymous articles are not accepted.

Upcoming deadlines:

Nr.	Articles	Notices	Publication date
7	15/12	20/12	2/1
8	5/1	10/1	23/1

- at 12 noon on the assigned date

RU graduates – the leaders of the future?

Roskilde University received two high-profile visitors when former Director General of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) Kenneth Plummer and Digital Director of advertising agencies In2Media and Responsive Troels Skjelbo visited the university to speak on modern leadership in connection with the leadership seminar “From basic to business”.

Text and photo by Emil Ryttergaard, RUGlobal

Director of In2Media and Responsive Troels Skjelbo and former Director General of DR, Kenneth Plummer attended the leadership seminar “From basic to business” held in the cinema of Communication and gave two very different talks on modern leadership. They revealed what is in store for future students aspiring to become leaders.

A former RU student returns

Troels Skjelbo is an RU graduate of Communication and Business Studies, from the time before the dot-com bubble had burst. Having held management positions with Codan, the now defunct Cybercity and later Telenor, Troels Skjelbo has broad experience.

He had come to talk about the challenges he faces on a daily basis at In2Media, which provides advisory services to businesses on everything from web browsing, apps to digital solutions. The company has three basic principles within three areas: technology, marketing and business, which are applied in unison, with equal focus on each of them. Covering these three aspects, the company is able to advise current and prospective customers on their electronic communication.

»The important factor is to know where you want to go: Far too many businesses don't know where they want to go or what they are doing. It's important to define a 'lighthouse', and my task is to steer towards that light-

house,« Troels Skjelbo said, pointing to a presentation slide with a lighthouse marked with the words *Digital Strategic Ambition*. Modern communication strategy can light up a dark sea of opportunities like a light house, and that is important if you want to achieve clear results and goals in return for your efforts; especially for businesses that want to exploit the new social media and opportunities.

»An expression that is often heard is 'We want to be on Facebook'.« As the manager, this is when I would say: »But why do we want to be on Facebook?« Troels Skjelbo explained.

Another much used word is “apps”, which have boomed with the advent of smartphones.

»We need an app'. But how can an app help in the relevant situation?«

Troels Skjelbo showed the audience an app they had developed for PFA Pension, which made the sale of pensions simpler and more transparent for the customer by involving the customer more. As pointed out by Troels Skjelbo, pensions are not the sexiest products to sell, but an app was able to change that.

Lower your ambitions

Troels Skjelbo also wanted to share his knowledge of the transition from study life to working life, and he used the expression *SNAFU* – *situation normal all fucked up*. The expression signifies that while the transition to a professional working life will have many

common denominators, there are many things that cannot be anticipated or read in a book.

But does it mean that RU students will be perfect leaders? No. We are too perfectionist, too thorough and too afraid of failure, Troels Skjelbo believed. He was, and he had to read just to thinking out of the systematic models he had been taught during his studies.

But how do we improve, then? Troels Skjelbo offered several answers to that question. Firstly, you should aim for a “starry sky” rather than “fireworks”. This could sound a bit like home-spun philosophy, but there is a clear intention behind the metaphor. »You are familiar with the situation. You hand in your thesis or project, and you pop the champagne cork. These are the fireworks. But when the momentary peaks have subsided, life returns to normal. This is the starry sky, and this is what you should aim for.«

Troels Skjelbo borrowed another piece of advice from Internet giant Google, which has turned it into its motto. The expression “Always in beta” signals that you should not be afraid of failure and releasing things so that they can be tried and tested and so that you can learn, he pointed out. But RU students do have several strong points, which were also highlighted by Troels Skjelbo:

continues

After the presentations, the audience members were given an opportunity to network. DR's former Director General, Kenneth Plummer.



About the seminar
 "From basic to business" was arranged by the unemployment insurance fund, the Danish Association of Managers and Executives, Venture Cup and students from Business Studies and Communication.

continued

»In fact, I believe that group work is what gives us a strong edge on the labour market and as leaders,« Troels Skjelbo explained, pointing to a slide on which the academic contents was far less prominent compared with the relations between and the organisation of people and colleagues.

Public service seen in a new light

After 45 minutes, Troels Skjelbo had to give the floor to the second key speaker, Kenneth Plummer, DR's former Director General from 2005 to 2010.

»On previous occasions, I experienced that the working procedures of DR were somewhat complex and very rigid, for instance when

negotiating film rights,« Kenneth Plummer explained, using a slide showing DR's structure with a radio director, TV director, programme director, and so on. Directors who would all fight over resources.

»In addition, management also took a highly theoretical approach and seldom applied holistic thinking, focusing, rather, on artistic, technical and other highly specific areas,« Kenneth Plummer said, repeatedly using the expression "silos" when expressing his view of the various professional areas.

It was almost obvious that things had to change, and the previous hierarchical structure underwent a major restructuring and

became a structure focusing on users in order to create quality products.

»A common HR policy was developed, in a joint collaboration between staff, management and unions, and this tied the business firmly together and created a strong sense of solidarity.«

Before we came this far, however, some difficult decisions had to be made, and Kenneth Plummer had to resort to using big words and take strong action in the broadcasting corporation.

»At top-management level, you tend not to talk of problems: you call them 'challenges'. But to put it bluntly, the cost-cutting plans for DR were a 'f...ing' big problem,« Kenneth Plummer said, laughing.

Among other things, the budgets did not take into account monthly cost deviations, which Kenneth Plummer was very surprised to learn when he took up the position.

»In my view, even the small kiosk on the harbour of Hornbæk would budget for monthly cost deviations,« he pointed out, and continued laughing.

»I also had to dismiss a senior manager who simply refused to keep his budgets. This had a great impact throughout the organisation, and I don't believe that there were any departments that did not stay within their budgets after this during my remaining time with DR.«

Whether it was the dismissal that influenced the employees or the restructuring of DR, which created new dynamics, is difficult to say for certain. However, Kenneth Plummer was very clear when it came to the results he achieved as director general:

»The DR brand is among the ten strongest brands today, budgets were met and employee satisfaction was at an all-time high in 2010.«

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Tips and tricks from Campus-it

Meet an RU employee

Have you ever wondered what the canteen chef is doing in his spare time? Or who the RU postman is?

RUGlobal now goes round and behind the thick concrete walls of RU and into the out-of-the-way corners of the Marbjerg Mark

facilities. Who is the gardener at RU? What does the RU printing office staff think of the students? And who is lurking in the darkness at RU when everybody else has gone home and the hallway lights have been turned off a long time ago?

In a new series of articles, RUGlobal will focus on some of the less visible assistants who help keep the wheels turning at RU and their quaint stories about life at the university.

“Shouldn’t be like calling the municipality”

Pernille Kaplan is a Study Secretary at the graduate Public Administration programme at RU and is also the woman who – due to her solution-oriented efficiency and a touch of maternal care – seems to be both indispensable and unavoidable for the students at the department.

Text and photo: Andreas Wraae, RUGlobal

RU students attending the graduate Social Sciences programme, Public Administration, at RU know who Pernille Kaplan is. There is no doubt about that. When students fail to submit their course enrolment applications, hand in projects or when straight questions require straight answers, and preferably as soon as possible, the lady seems to be both unavoidable and indispensable. She has an attitude and a drive, indicating that she focuses on solutions rather than problems when assisting students with big and small issues.

“We don’t want our service to be comparable to that of the municipalities endlessly transferring you to person after person”, Pernille Kaplan establishes in her hurried fashion.

Her focus is rightly on the issues students bring in and on solving them as soon as possible. However, sometimes she sternly wags her finger at them.

“A minor telling-off with a smile. I do give them that. But that is only because I have come to know the students. I know who forget

to submit their applications and so on. That is when I give them a friendly telling-off. It feels a little like having children,” she says laughing.

Someone to talk to

“I want to feel passionate about my work; that is important to me,” she says.

And in addition to that, she prefers to be amongst other people.

“I would be bored to death, if I were to be by myself all day”, she says bluntly.

Because that is what she is. Blunt.

- That is why I am pleased to have so many colleagues here.

Already when she was young, Pernille knew that she liked talking to other people, and for that reason she much appreciated her first job in a small fruit and vegetable store in Solrød (south of Copenhagen), serving at the till.

“I liked the contact with the customers. It was a store where – in the slightly old fashioned

way – we weighed the vegetables on a scale while talking to the customers,” Pernille adds.

In 1985, she worked as a trainee at the Danish Ministry of Education’s Department of General Upper Secondary Education. After she completed her traineeship, she was offered a permanent job at the Ministry, where she worked until 2001. She joined RU in January 2003 and has been with the university for nearly nine years now.

On her toes

“On Saturday, for example, we are a couple of people from the office going to Tivoli”, Pernille adds to show that it is not all just about work. At the office, shared by the secretaries from the different programmes at the Department of Society and Globalisation, they do talk about things other than work.

“We talk about our home life, how things are with the kids, our husbands, or if someone has bought a new car, for example. Just about everything. It doesn’t mean that we spend all day chatting though:

continues

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- We are very much on our toes here in the department when it comes to introducing new systems. We were, for example, the first ones to start using the system named SAPS that registers teachers' lessons and which counselors have been assigned to which students. I like the fact that we can help influence things at RU," says Pernille.

"Here, you can help plan your workdays and have your say, and you will be heard. I very much appreciate that," she emphasises.

Seven people in a three bedroom flat

Pernille grew up in Brøndbyøster (south east of Copenhagen). However, life close to Copenhagen is not what attracts her. After a couple of years in a three-bedroom flat in Korsør shared with her husband and five shared children, they bought a house with space for everyone in Korsør. "I love to work at full power during the day and to withdraw from the hectic life of a city in the evening", she adds.

A funny thing about Pernille's home is that they have two TVs in their living room because



the entire family is crazy about sports, especially football and cycling.

"Sometimes, there are two games on at the same time. So if you want to follow both games, you need two TVs," she says laughing. Despite of the smile on her face, it is obvious that sports is a serious matter. In fact, it is so

Pernille Kaplan was born in 1967 at Øresunds-hospitalet (the Oeresund hospital).

She lives in Korsør together with her husband and the youngest of their five shared children.

Since 2003, she has worked as a Study Secretary at the graduate Public Administration programme at the Department of Society and Globalisation (ISG) at RU.

serious that it is not unusual for the family to check the score on Teletext even when visiting friends and family members.

"They have got used to it by now. That is just the way it is," establishes Pernille.

Keeping up philosophical appearances



Mikkel Wendelboe

Roskilde University is the breeding ground of many things – answers, questions, theses and science. All smart terms describing what happens between us, around us and inside us, launched ages ago solely for the interest of information. "You know nothing", preaches the lecturers and professors while encouraging their students to seek the truth. Because it is out there the Truth. But first the researcher to be must know through which glasses he wants to view and interpret the world. So this is when the sports enthusiast naturally asks himself – any sports glasses available?

Text and photo: Mikkel Wendelboe, RUGlobal

The world viewed through a drop of water. Or at least RU viewed through the eyes of this skilled sports fanatic. It is cold. Visibility is close to zero and King Winter has given warnings that he might be near with his biting winds which immediately make my teeth chatter. It feels as if they were coming directly from Siberia, and I therefore stifle a sniffle. RU is laid out in front of me – in all its splendour – and at my usual speed I walk attentively through the main entrance hovering proudly above my head.

“The stronghold of science”, I think to myself and at the same time feel the enormous weight of information gently warming my heart. A feeling, however, that makes me stop. Because that is exactly the type of perception I have been trying to fight off. All common understandings of RU must be thrown overboard – instead I must try thinking out of the box; try seeing RU in a different context. A context that has a slight smell of changing rooms and that raises hopes of winning the grand gold medal at the end.

When it comes down to it, life is like a football match or a game of squash – the only thing is that you need to know where to look. Sports and competition are part of our lives, they set the framework for our efforts and draw us into their remarkable world – whether we want to or not.

I give a sigh of relief. A group of basic studies graduates walk closely past me, surrounded by a happy atmosphere – like an aura of serenity. “They have probably only studied here for a couple of months”, I think to myself – “and have probably only just been through their first group set-up”.

I snort. Group set-up. The first challenge on any student’s road to the gold. A process that



The start portal. With just a little bit of imagination, you can find sports everywhere...

cheerfully calls to mind my childhood school yard with the first and second choosers in turn selecting which hopeful little fellows are to play on their respective football teams. The analogy is unquestionable.

My feet carry me on through campus, and anywhere I go, RU’s “citizens” are wrapped up in heavy coats. Winter is coming. And so are the first examinations; the ultimate training pass on the road to the Champions League of science. A process that will repeat itself again and again.

“Come on boy, you can take another round”, yells the coach, and the willing student therefore keenly sprints another round. Collecting more empiricism, studying more theory and making new hypotheses – where does it all lead to then? If students stick to their training programmes, win their matches and don’t end up being sweepers in series five, then where does that leave them?

I slowly pass a sign encouraging visitors to attend a PhD defense presentation, and at the back of my head I consider going in. Here is my chance to see the elite; my chance to see where – in the best of all scenarios – the race ends. Where it ends if you throw a dice and you get a six and sends the runner sprinting all

the way to the goal. The lecturers and professors are the Pelés, Maradonas and Laudrup in the RU game.

“You know nothing”, I repeat to myself and think of my countless number of lectures. “However, if only we follow the rules, we can get to know everything”.

A smile is hovering about my lips, and as I bury my hands deep in my pockets, I can’t help laughing briefly. The number of sporting structures influences the entire RU organisation; its hierarchy, pecking order and processes.

Will I ever win the gold, I wonder? Cold and freezing, I head towards the canteen, and for a time I leave the arena to itself. In due time, it will send for me to do another match.

Because sports is what you make of it. It is in our nature to compete and to seek to the top. You can find sports and games in the most unlikely of places and in the most fascinating forms. The competition of your life never stops, and between the walls of RU, there is kick off thousands of times every day. We’ll just leave that hanging in the air for now.

Enjoy the match!



Sporting arenas do not need to be grass-covered, but may easily be built in bricks.