

Arts-based learning at work: economic downturns, innovation upturns, and the eminent practicality of arts in business

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Today, amidst one of history's most severe downturns in our global economy, business is seeking to leverage creativity and innovation to realize the upside of the downturn. Consider this . . .

In the January 19, 2009 edition of *Business Week*, Columbia University professor of business and former McKinsey executive, Amar Bhidé suggests that there may be gain from the pain, referring to our present economic downturn. Bhidé believes adversity will make people and organizations more innovative. He reminds us that history has proven that recession is often a stimulus for innovation. On February 24, 2009, US President Barack Obama, addressing a joint session of Congress, took a moment to look back, pointing to the innovations that have arisen from times of economic adversity. Obama's message was clear: times of economic adversity can inspire innovation. And, Bill Gates, Microsoft founder, optimistically reminds us of the possibility of an economic downturn generating an innovation upturn (May, 2008). What these business, political, and academic leaders remind us, is that economic adversity can inspire innovation.

There is also a well known and documented understanding of how the arts enable scientific invention, offered by individuals like Robert Root-Bernstein (2000), who shares the following examples drawn from a single group of products – cell phone and PDA's:

- A commonly used form of encryption called "frequency hopping," that ensures messages can not easily be intercepted, was invented by American composer George Antheil in collaboration with the actress Hedy Lamarr.
- The electronic screens that display our messages (and those on our computer and TV) employ a combination of red, green, and blue dots from which all the different colors can be generated – the result of painter-scientists (including American physicist Ogden Rood and Nobel laureate Wilhelm Ostwald) drawing on the techniques of post-impressionist artists like George Seurat.
- The programming inside smart phones (and most modern programming language) borrows from techniques pioneered by J.M. Jacquard, a weaver, who invented programmable looms using punch cards.

These examples from business history remind us that the arts foster innovation. By extension, if we hobble the arts, we in turn, often unintentionally, hobble innovation.

Ironically, however, as the economy stumbles, one of the first things to typically get cut in government spending and school curricula, and at all levels – is the arts. Consider, for example, how California, in response to the dot.com bust of 2001 cut its arts council budget from \$30 million to \$1 million (a reduction of 97 percent) over the next two years. And, more recently, in the initial response to the current recession, Ohio has cut its arts funding by 47 percent, Arizona by 54 percent, and Florida by an astounding 94 percent. Such government

policies implicitly suggest that the arts are luxuries we can do without in times of economic downturn.

But enlightened and strategic thinking business leaders understand this relationship between the arts and innovation; and especially in times of economic downturn, they realize that innovation upturns are enabled by investment in the arts (Seifter, 2005; Bartelme, 2005; Boyle and Ottensmeyer, 2005). So, in these times of economic distress, we should take a lesson from the pages of our history books – economic adversity can inspire extraordinary innovation, if we choose to engage the arts as enablers of business creativity.

Strategic leadership is presently confronted with an eminently practical question: how can we continue to help leaders in our organizations learn to leverage creativity against the economic adversity resultant from the present downturn? Recall, it was Albert Einstein who asserted, “we can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”. Indeed, our world is shifting beneath our feet, and new thinking will be required to deal with the complexity and solve the more wicked problems that are now confronting us. Arts-inspired creativity has historically played a role and continues presently to enable innovation – helping leaders realize the upside of the downturn!

For this special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy*, guest editors Harvey Seifter and Ted Buswick have asked me to exchange ideas with a number of prominent business leaders, artists and respected management educators from around the globe, whose comments about arts-based learning in business color the ideas presented in this article – adding texture and a richer perspective.

The intention of my contribution is to offer some context for the reader’s understanding of arts-based learning in business. First, arts-based learning is situated within the broader arts in business context as well as our present reality of the economic downturn. Then, I share why arts-based learning has emerged as a new pedagogy in management education. Next, I offer a working definition of arts-based learning and share how others are conceiving it. Lastly, I turn attention to the question, what are the strengths and limitations of arts-based learning, and suggest a couple leading edge management education programs that are framed by arts-based learning approaches.

Why the arts? Why now?

First, consider the comments of Julie Muraco (Senior Managing Director of NASDAQ Stock Market Capital Markets Group and a Board Member for Americans for the Arts). Julie asserts that the artist’s skills are needed more now than ever given our present economic distress and failures of business as usual. She calls upon the executive suite to take a leadership role in this pivotal time, to embrace the transformative potential that the arts and arts-based learning have to offer:

Arts organizations can teach corporate America a variety of skills and processes that are not emphasized in the normal curriculum of the world’s top business schools. These skills are desperately needed by corporate America’s workforce to remain competitive in the global economy.

They are intuitive and qualitative skills. The arts can teach communication and presentation; team building and problem solving; or product and systems innovation. Arts based training can be designed to teach corporate America about undefined outcomes, the allowance for failure and risk-taking.

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There are well-documented case studies about arts organizations' consultations with corporations to provide these types of skills and processes. One example: in a ten-day, 15-city investor road show, a corporate executive gives the same presentation 30-40 times. How does that executive keep it fresh and inspiring? Look to the theatre and dance companies who do this every day. Another example: team-building skills are important to the increasingly remote and technologically connected workforce. How does a manager keep his team focused on the same corporate goals? Look to the orchestras and dance companies that must work in concert (no pun intended) for every performance.

Why aren't arts organizations more pervasive in corporate consulting? Perhaps because the results can't be measured in days, weeks or sometimes months. As long as the modern public corporation is focused on short-term results, the necessary soft skills of intuitive cognition, creativity and innovation, that we desperately need to remain competitive, will not be readily embraced where we need it the most – in the executive suite (Julie Muraco).

While it is useful to begin with a broad understanding of the arts in business context, this special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy* is more specifically focused on the phenomenon of arts-based learning and its relevance to strategy, leadership, and organizational performance. Consider this perspective on the capacity of the arts as learning tools to significantly contribute to our broader society and the future of our knowledge economy, from Robert Lynch, President and CEO of Americans for the Arts:

We live and work in a global, inter-connected world where our ability to sustain a high quality American way of life, a vibrant business economy, and peaceful, positive relationships with other citizens of the world is dependent upon developing our creative and cultural capacities.

The arts develop the imagination, as well as spatial thinking and abstract reasoning. These are essential skills for tomorrow's software designers, scientists, entrepreneurs and engineers, and mandatory for both leaders and workers to succeed in a rapidly changing global economy.

In "Ready to innovate" (The Conference Board, Americans for the Arts, and the American Association of School Administrators) business leaders identified "arts-related study in college" as one of two top indicators of creativity; superintendents ranked the arts degree highest. Yet, less than 10 percent of companies provide creativity training to all their employees, and schools provide arts classes primarily on an elective basis. The report concludes that: "... both sectors see involvement in the arts and other work experience as markers of creativity ... it is clear that the arts-music, creative writing, drawing, dance – provide skills sought by employers of the third millennium."

Business leaders have partners in creating local arts-based training initiatives. Local arts commissions and industry leaders are ready and willing to help identify artists and community arts resources and design creative training experiences.

In a century characterized by the growing dominance of the "knowledge-based economy," ensuring that our workforce masters the creative skills and habits of mind that fuel our knowledge is a capital investment we cannot afford to miss (Robert Lynch).

Glen Fukushima, CEO of Airbus, Japan, sees a direct causal link between arts-based learning and organizational effectiveness/business success, which goes to the heart of why arts-based learning represents such a powerful resource for business:

The relevance of artistic skills, processes, and experiences to management and organizational effectiveness are clearly evinced in the case of music.

The activities of an orchestra and a company may seem on first impression unrelated. Yet, the process by which an orchestra successfully performs a symphony, for instance, and the process by which a company achieves business results share important similarities.

Members of an orchestra need carefully to observe and listen to others in the orchestra as well as to follow the conductor's lead. Coordination and creative teamwork are essential to yield the desired outcome. Even if the orchestra includes "superstar" performers, they need to work in concert with the rest of the team to produce the best musical result.

In much the same way, a company or its division needs close alignment among its members and with the CEO or division head to achieve the optimal business result. In this sense, the discipline, focus, and creative teamwork that are so important for orchestral success are also required for business success. By imparting the skills of listening, observing, and creative teamwork, education for orchestral performance can contribute importantly to management and organizational effectiveness to produce business success (Glen Fukushima).

Why arts-based learning has emerged as a new pedagogy in management education

One cannot deny the emergence of arts-based learning in business, or its presence as a recognized and highly regarded management pedagogy. But many still ask “why”? One commonly heard response is: the arts offer a means for us to make sense of the growing complexity that managers and leaders are confronted with. Scharmer (2009), Adler (2006), and Seifert (2004) have strongly asserted that given the degree of complexity that leaders and managers are faced with, today, the search for ways to make sense of the complexity is an urgent task. Organizational scholar Steve Taylor (Professor, Worcester Polytechnic Institute), who explores the intersection of arts and organizational life, similarly asserts that the arts may offer us an “other” way, beyond the boundaries of science and analytical reasoning, to make sense of complexity in the business environment:

We live in a very complex environment, filled with an overwhelming barrage of physical, social, and symbolic stimuli. Over time, we have developed three different ways to make sense of our world. The first is to interpret the stimuli based upon our own experience and personal mythology and project what it means to us out onto the world. This is usually unconscious and is often deeply problematic as our sensemaking of the world tells us far more about ourselves than it does about the rest of the world. The second method is to invoke science and analytic reasoning, carefully reducing the stimuli to numbers (if possible), reducing the numbers to trends and causal relationships, and then acting based upon this analytic representation of the world. The third is the approach of the arts, which is to pay careful attention to the stimuli and listen deeply with the whole self for the meaning and then represent that meaning with an artistic form (novel, painting, dance, etc.) that captures the complexity and offers an essence of that complexity. We cannot avoid the first method, and the second often misses the mark in our modern, complex world. The arts offer us the third method (Steve Taylor).

Donna Sturgess (Global Head of Innovation, GlaxoSmithKlein) offers a similar perspective, suggesting that in light of growing complexity, and the limitations of a science-only perspective, the arts offer us a new lens to help make sense of our business challenges:

“Science works with chunks and bits and pieces of things with the continuity presumed, and (the artist) works only with the continuities of things with the chunks and bits and pieces presumed” (Pirsig, 1974).

Art-based activities can provide a new lens for science or business to look through to tackle problems or shift perceptions. Simply talking about pictures rather than data is a new start point for fresh dialogue. If you were to draw a Venn diagram with the two primary circles marked Business and Art, the overlapping center between the two would be creativity. Both disciplines depend on creativity for survival and progression.

We have found that art-based tools help teams to see beyond the obvious to generate new ideas. Adventures through art give us more transformative experiences where new ideas emerge and our awareness is heightened to see beyond the obvious. Attitudes and influences on our thinking are made visible and our imaginations are stimulated. Art teaches business the ability to conceptualize and to push beyond the established norms and boundaries (Donna Sturgess).

Another key factor behind the emergence of arts-based learning is a growing skepticism about the ability of traditional management education and leadership development to fully address the creative challenges facing today’s managers and leaders (e.g. Pinard and Allio, 2005).

Elsewhere, I have suggested that the emergence of arts-based learning in business may be compared with fusion cuisine (Nissley, 2008). Fusion cuisine might be described as a demonstration by chefs of their creative disillusionment with traditional cooking – an expression framed by a determination to make food more interesting, generate excitement about diverse ingredients from different cooking traditions that contribute to the overall excellence of the dish while retaining the individual flavors or characters of the ingredients. Similarly, there is a disillusionment, coupled with a sense of possibility, being expressed by those in business and management/leadership education (e.g. Adler, 2006; Seifert and Buswick, 2005; Beckwith, 2003). The sense of possibility emerging at the intersection of arts and business manifests itself in the growing integration of arts-based learning into management education and leadership development. Similar to the fusion chefs, business

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educators (e.g. Gallos, 2009) are seeking more expressive ways of engaging in their practice – to generate innovative and stimulating business and management/leadership education experiences.

So, what is arts-based learning?

Darso (2004) was one of the first to describe the ways in which we’re finding the arts in business:

- *decoration* – the artwork in lobbies/corridors, and the pictures on office walls (e.g. corporate art);
- *entertainment* – bringing the arts/performances into the office space (e.g. giving employees tickets to arts events);
- *instrument* – when business uses the arts as an instrument for management/leadership development (e.g., teambuilding, communication skills development, etc.); and
- *strategic transformation* – when the business integrates the arts in areas such as vision and values, creativity and innovation, branding, and marketing.

This special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy* focuses on both the instrumental and transformative dimensions of the arts-business relationship.

Dr Nancy Adler (2006), one of the world’s most prominent scholars of organizational leadership, observes that organizations, communities, and nation-states are calling on their people for more creativity and innovation. And as we enter the twenty-first century, Adler describes examples of how we are seeing increasing numbers of leaders bringing artists and artistic processes into their organizations, and offers examples of how arts-based learning is making its presence known to business:

1. The work done by poet David Whyte, with senior executives at companies such as McDonald Douglas and Boeing.
2. The collaboration of a Harvard Business School professor with a theatre director to author the book *Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work*.
3. Denmark’s world renowned Copenhagen Business School opening the world’s first business-school-based Center for Art and Leadership.
4. The work done by the conductorless Orpheus Chamber Orchestra with corporations and business schools all over the world demonstrating flat management and high performance teamwork.
5. Leading business schools worldwide adding arts-based courses to their curriculum, including:
 - Wharton’s compulsory MBA workshop “Leadership through the Arts”, facilitated by the noted dance company Pilobolus;

- at MIT, three of the 2003/2004 Sloan Leadership courses had arts-based components, including “Unconventional Leadership: A Performing Advantage” and “Leadership as Acting: Performing *Henry V*”; and
- the University of Chicago’s required Leadership Exploration and Development course, where MBAs write, produce, and showcase a film.

Similarly, Taylor and Ladkin (2009) offer additional examples of arts-based learning approaches in leadership development and management education:

- Danish managers building three-dimensional representations of their organizational strategy using LEGO bricks.
- US Army leaders looking to cinema to illustrate key ideas about leadership.
- MBA students at Babson College taking art classes to enhance their creativity.

Ironically, while the practice of arts-based learning in business is growing exponentially; Taylor and Ladkin (2009) note, “it is very difficult to talk about arts-based methods in any coherent way because a wide range of approaches that can result in a variety of different goals and outcomes are used” (p. 55).

Here, I offer a working definition of arts-based learning in the context of business, and more specifically in management education and leadership/organization development. The definition is intended to provide a common understanding as you consider the varied contributions in this special edition.

Arts-based learning describes a wide range of approaches by which management educators and leadership/organization development practitioners are instrumentally using the arts as a pedagogical means to contribute to the learning and development of individual organization managers and leaders, as well as contributing to organizational learning and development.

In Nissley (2008, 2002), I made attempts to map the diverse approaches to naming and defining the field we’re referring to, here, as arts-based learning. Most recently, Taylor and Ladkin (2009) and Gallos, (2009) have provided useful descriptions of arts-based methods in both learning and teaching contexts, respectively. Taylor and Ladkin (2009, pp. 56-60) identify four processes that are particular to the way in which arts-based methods contribute to the development of managers and leaders, which, they assert, do not operate within conventional organizational development processes:

1. *Skills transfer*. Arts-based methods can facilitate the development of artistic skills that can be usefully applied in organizational settings (e.g., medical residents being taught theatre/narrative skills to increase their clinical empathy).
2. *Projective technique*. The output of arts-based methods may reveal inner thoughts and feelings that may not be accessible through more conventional development methods – using the arts as a means of fostering reflection through projection (e.g. managers/leaders engaging in building three-dimensional representations of their organizational strategy using LEGO bricks).
3. *Illustration of essence*. Arts-based methods can enable participants to apprehend the “essence” of a concept (e.g. the use of film being used to illustrate key ideas about leadership).
4. *Making*. Engaging in art making as a means to express oneself, and afford access to our deep interior life (e.g. MBA students taking art classes to enhance their creativity).

The applications of these arts-based learning models are being increasingly chronicled in the business education literature (e.g. Austin and Devin, 2003, pp. 15-16; Darso, 2004, pp. 149-59; Hatch *et al.*, 2005, pp. 132-41; Nissley, 2004, p. 292; Palus and Horth, 2002, p. 6; Woodward and Funk, 2004).

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What are the strengths and limitations of arts-based learning?

There’s a growing sense in business education that leaders in organizations are too often limited in the range of competencies they use – that rational-analytical competencies are obviously valuable, but insufficient by themselves.

Some organizational scholars and leadership educators have suggested that creative competencies are under-explored and potentially valuable ways for leaders to perceive, understand, and act on complex challenges in our organizations. For example, leadership experts such as Chuck Palus and David Horth (2002) from the Center for Creative Leadership (*The Leader’s Edge: Six Creative Competencies for Navigating Complex Challenges*) and Mary Jo Hatch and colleagues, authors of, *The Three Faces of Leadership: Manager, Artist, Priest* (Hatch *et al.*, 2005), assert the value of leadership competencies more closely aligned with artists and found in artistic practice, than in the traditional technical sphere of the practices of managing in the workplace.

Tim Stockil, the former Director of Arts & Business UK’s Creative Development department points us to the process of “practice” that artists use to arrive at a new creation, or more specifically, the performing arts practice of “rehearsal”:

Art is about creating something out of nothing. Nothing that artists create was there until they invented it.

So what processes do artists use to arrive at a new product? One key process is practice. They try things out – the sculptor makes a maquette, the painter makes sketches, the poet writes draft after draft. In the performing arts, practice is called rehearsal.

But businesses rarely rehearse. It’s unusual for a business leader to rehearse a presentation. Really rehearse, that is – repeat the presentation umpteen times, adding nuance and subtlety, pacing, pauses, emphasis, emotion, building it from the first stumblings to a highly polished, highly effective speech – one that really merits the applause it gets.

Even rarer is the business that rehearses its own future. What will its stores look like and feel like in five, ten years’ time? How will the factory function? What kind of services will its market demand? And how will they cope if disaster strikes?

Many businesses talk about these futures but few embody them. Rehearsal is about “embodied learning” – developing and repeating changes until the change fits the person or the body corporate like a glove. The successful business of the future must learn how to rehearse (Tim Stockil).

Colin Funk, the former Director of Creative Programming and the Leadership Learning Lab at The Banff Centre, speaks to the capacity of arts-based learning to go beyond mere assistance with “simplification,” by affording clarity to managers approaching the complex problems that characterize today’s leadership challenges. Funk’s thinking parallels the writing of Palus and Horth (2002), who’s research at the Center for Creative Leadership revealed six leadership competencies for facing complex challenges. Funk (ironically, trained as an improvisation artist) asserts that we might more effectively approach today’s complex challenges through arts-based learning, using the actor’s technique of “brain calming” to help us change the pace of our attention:

For years, one of the most popular forms of arts-based approaches to creative problem solving has been improvisational theatre, which delivers spontaneity, fun and playful ways to get “out of the box.” However, as leaders from all sectors today find themselves in uncharted waters, the demand for not only quantity, but quality of ideas is paramount. Just as potent as the many

powerful techniques from the world of Improv Theatre, comes a more appropriate practice and inquiry tool for these times – brain-calming.

Brain-calming is the counter-point to spontaneity – fundamental techniques that actors use for preparation to enter on to the stage. This employs primarily slowing down, connecting to breath and body, and focused visualization – a precursor to accessing deep knowing, confidence and courage. Many of us experience the effects of brain-calming (off stage) as a powerful idea source when we are in the shower, on long drives or walks, or emerging from a dream. For leaders, brain-calming gives us permission and techniques for making the ordinary “extraordinary”. It can assist us in developing deeper contemplation, focus and competency in meta-cognition – all critical for avoiding a leader’s blind spots.

As we begin to strategize on how to best navigate the uncharted waters of the future – in our personal lives and in business – perhaps it is time to invest in the “calm” before the “storm” (Colin Funk).

Similarly, Piers Ibbotson, founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Directing Creativity Program, speaks to a central strength of arts-based learning methods by offering a theatre director’s insights to how leaders might more effectively “direct” creativity within their organizations. However, Ibbotson also offers a cautionary note:

Yes, arts-based learning has unique capabilities for developing managers. It is experiential and develops embodied rather than cognitive knowledge. It educates feelings, imagination and emotions, all fundamental to human communication and the appropriate functioning of organizations. No other practice does this so well. Does it make a difference in the workplace? Well, that depends on the workplace. Arts-based learning, like art, is about developing the complex. It accepts and explores ambiguity and conflict; it thrives in a culture that is functionally the opposite of “free market capitalism” namely; a culture of collaboration, operating within a gift economy. If it is successful, it can return people to their organizations with some fundamental questions in their hearts that have the potential to transform their organizations – questions that may be so challenging that the organization rejects them. If it is unsuccessful, it can at least produce magnificent communicators and wonderfully creative leaders who struggle on in the old system with more hope, having adapted what they have discovered to their organizations’ demands. The problem lies in the contract. Are arts-based practitioners contracting to improve the organization according to the organizations values, or are they really trying to make the organization better by the values of art? Most commercial contracts between arts practitioners and organizations, assume, quite appropriately, that “improvements in organizational effectiveness” will be measured by the organization. This can severely limit the transformational potential that arts-based learning has to offer (Piers Ibbotson).

As Ibbotson (2008) implies, arts-based learning, like any strategy, has its limitations. Similarly, Daved Barry, a well-known scholar at the intersection of arts and business and Professor at the University of Lisbon, focuses on the question of organizational context:

In my experience, the answer to whether arts-based learning can make a difference is no, yes, and maybe. I have seen several arts-based education efforts bomb terribly, to a point where they have turned off the hiring company to any future arts-based engagements. Conversely, I have seen magic happen. Some of the “aha’s” that have developed have been profound, long lasting, and changeful. This has especially been true of some of the longer-term engagements (from months to years). The “maybe” zone I’m thinking about is where instructors use the arts to accompany workplace learning, attempting to make it richer and more palatable; e.g. enhancing leadership development with “Henry the 5th.” Used well, arts-based accompaniment can certainly open up thinking. But it can also be used to mask corporate rhetoric and work practices, leaving employees singing, dancing, and “fa la la-ing” in their sweatshops and sweaty offices. Through associating such rhetoric with the arts, corporate messages and work practices can acquire an illegitimate legitimacy. In this sense, I think we need to be particularly mindful of what we are doing when we open up the arts box, lest it become Pandora’s Box as well (Daved Barry).

While debate will always characterize any consideration of strengths and limitations of arts-based learning methods, it’s important that the field embraces research and empirical data to allow us to better understand the effectiveness of such methods, especially in these times. Colin Tweedy, Chief Executive Arts & Business UK notes:

As business senses a chill wind, they need to do three things. To reconnect with a more mistrustful public, to surprise a hunger in themselves for creativity, and to attract and retain their most talented employees. Arts & Business believes that arts-based learning can deliver on all these agendas.

Since Arts & Business began working in this field over a decade ago, we have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of the arts to help reshape business practice and processes. From the astonishing and wide-ranging programme adopted by Unilever (called “Project Catalyst”) through to myriad smaller scale projects in individual business across the UK, arts based learnings are being effectively translated into a business environment.

The difficulty is proving it – to offer a consistent formula to measure this value. We need this evidence to convince the doubters and reward the believers. By working alongside Professor Giovanni Schiuma, Visiting Research Fellow at the Cranfield School of Management, on a major report that quantifies and measures the impact of arts-based initiatives, we are closer than ever to this magic proof. This Arts & Business report, released in the Spring 2009, captures the success of these artistic interventions in viable and durable applications (Colin Tweedy).

Leading edge practice of arts-based learning: what are the trends? Who to watch?

Since the previous *Journal of Business Strategy* special edition on arts-based learning for business (Seifter and Buswick, 2005), we have witnessed the growth and increasingly widespread use of arts-based learning in the workforce. Organizations such as Americans for the Arts and Arts & Business UK have championed and begun to document the value and impact of arts-based learning within the workplace.

The literature documenting the practice of arts-based learning is finally “catching up” with the actual practice of arts-based learning in organizations. For example, this special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy* (2010) as well as the 2005 special edition on Arts-based learning for business have offered case studies, documents the use of arts-based learning in businesses such as Unilever, McGraw Hill, The Boston Consulting Group, Intercontinental Hotels, Microsoft, ABN AMRO, and Procter & Gamble, among others.

My 2008 overview of the field (which updated my 2002 survey) along with Adler’s (2006), Taylor and Ladkin’s (2009) research, and Gallo’s (2008) contribution offer some of the most up to date insights to “what’s going on; when/where is arts-based learning occurring and who is doing it?” In addition, the literature continues to grow with documented examples suggesting both a diversity of business applications and art forms that are being engaged. For example, these approaches range from business strategy (e.g. Burgi *et al.*, 2005; Roos *et al.*, 2004) and entrepreneurship (e.g. Daum, 2005) to theatre improvisation (e.g. Corsun *et al.*, 2006) and poetry (e.g. Grisham, 2006).

Two leading edge, formal management education/leadership development programmes that are designed around arts-based learning approaches, are on the must see list: Copenhagen Business School/Danish School of Education Masters Program in Leadership and Innovation in Complex Systems (LAICS) and Oxford University’s Strategic Leadership Programme (OSLP). Lotte Darso, founder of the LAICS program and Marshall Young, director of the OSLP programme offer the following insights to these top programs and how arts-based learning has framed their design and delivery:

In 2006 The Danish School of Education launched a Masters degree program, “Leadership and Innovation in Complex Systems” (LAICS), together with Copenhagen Business School. This education is a living example of what arts-based learning can contribute to leadership development.

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Why did we do this? Because good leadership is authentic leadership, meaning that the students must reflect on questions such as: Who am I as a leader? What sources am I operating from? And the arts offer new “languages” for reflection and expression in relation to discovering important personal values and principles for leadership.

How do we do this? In some of the seminars we invite professional artists to do master classes with the students in order to get new angles on the scheduled topics. We use theatre rehearsal, music, dance, drawing, prototyping, etc. In one particular seminar on personal leadership we all travel to The Banff Centre, in Canada, to work with storytelling, expression and communication through clay, theatre rehearsal techniques, nature walks, ecosculptures, etc.

What is the outcome? Leaders who can navigate innovation in a complex world. Artful leaders, who care about people, profit and planet. As a matter of fact, arts-based learning offers unique potential for developing leadership competencies for business (Lotte Darso).

The Oxford Strategic Leadership Programme (OSLP) is anchored on the notion of leadership as rooted in the art of putting ideas into action. This perspective naturally highlights the importance of practical judgment in leadership. Practical judgment is developed by leveraging experience, especially the experience of others. Accessing this experience is strongly influenced by the language others use to encapsulate and communicate it. Exploring the different aesthetic and presentational languages artists use to encapsulate their message, the performances through which they communicate, and their degree of comfort with messages concerning affect and ethics shows what a rich and broad palette they use compared to typical management discourse. It highlights the fact that good judgment must draw on the whole brain, on both propositional and aesthetic or narrative intelligence if it is to really leverage experience effectively.

Modern Western culture implants a deep-seated assumption that equates thinking and language with logic and literacy. Logic and literacy are clearly important, but they are only part of the notions of perception and communication that an aesthetic perspective allows.

Our work with music, poetry, art and sculpture and drama aims to develop (or in many cases simply revive) an awareness and understanding of what working within an aesthetic frame involves. For most leaders it will be very strange territory. A guided tour of the domain by a good reflective practitioner from that domain will still leave many questions unanswered, but our experience shows it is a good place to start (Marshall Young).

Back to where we started – realizing the upside of the downturn

What has changed since the 2005 special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy*? Of course – the economic downturn. The continued growth in the use of arts-based learning, even in the challenging times, suggests that now, more than ever, leaders are looking to arts-inspired creativity, as a means to realize the upside of the downturn.

Tammy Mattson (Senior Vice President, Towers Perrin) suggests an integral role for the arts to play in an organization’s efforts to create a culture of innovation – which is central to business strategy in the economic downturn:

Through arts based learning programs, people can enhance essential skills needed in today’s economy: developing and implementing ideas, taking considered risks and collaborating with other organizations in the community. As businesses align themselves with arts and cultural organizations, they become more in tune with the creative process. And they take that knowledge back to the workplace.

The celebration of creativity that is so fundamental to the arts is just as critical to business. Without an entrepreneurial spirit, without a continual flow of new and innovative ideas to address a changing economy and customer demands, businesses cannot survive.

Promoting creativity and fostering an innovation spirit is not exclusive to those willing to make a major investment in technology, and creativity need not be limited to certain industries. We discovered that, with a few small changes in mindset, using lessons from the arts world to form an innovative company is within everyone’s reach.

Innovation can and should take shape anywhere and everywhere in the business model, from the way people work, to the way a company makes money, to its structure and operations. It’s the things we do every day that matter most when it comes to creating a culture of innovation (Tammy Mattson).

“ Business leaders have partners in creating local arts-based training initiatives. Local arts commissions and industry leaders are ready and willing to help identify artists and community arts resources and design creative training experiences. ”

Harvey Seifter and Hamsa Thota (an internationally recognized product and technology innovation performance management expert and a member of the US National Innovation Initiative Strategy Council) advocate for an alliance of the arts and business communities in service of global competitiveness, and remind us of the imminent practicality of arts in business when they suggest that, “art helps different answers emerge”. And, recall, it was Albert Einstein who asserted, “we can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them”:

A fundamental lesson of our age is that economic gain is no longer sufficient; today’s business organization needs to re-register its purposes to include other forms of value creation as well, by utilizing individual creative abilities to achieve organizational purposes that balance economic interests with social good and ecological responsibility. Engaging the heart, mind and spirit of individual members in pursuit of this “creative harmony” is imperative in twenty-first century business, and the application of creativity to problem solving, once the exclusive domain of executives, is now required throughout the workforce. In this new world, sharing an understanding of what a business stands for, where it is going, what kind of a world it wants to live in, and how to make that world a reality becomes a critical function of leadership. Art is an essential discovery process that allows leaders to explore their creative potential, bring forth tacit knowledge, synthesize understanding, develop collaborative skills, and transform abstract insights into products in the physical world. By asking different questions, seeking different sorts of explanations, and looking at different points of view, art helps different answers emerge. With America’s global competitiveness hanging in the balance, the business community is a natural ally to the cause of art (Hamsa Thota and Harvey Seifter).

The realities of our present economic downturn coupled with the continued emergence and growth of the knowledge economy reminds us that new ways of working together will require new ways of learning how to work together. Best-selling business author, Peter Economy, suggests that arts-based learning may offer such a new way of learning how to work together:

Just about 50 years ago – in 1959 – management visionary Peter Drucker famously coined the term “knowledge worker,” meaning a person who works primarily with information or who develops and uses knowledge in the workplace. During his long career, Drucker identified a number of good models of knowledge-based organizations, but his favorite seemed to be the orchestra. An orchestra represented in his mind the ultimate knowledge-based organization, where “. . . 30 different instrumentalists play the same score together as a team.”

There is a reason that Drucker chose the orchestra as a model for the knowledge organization: because the teamwork and collaborative skills required for a group of diverse men and women to create beautiful music together are nowhere else as evident as in a musical ensemble. The good news is that these same skills can be identified, isolated, taught, and learned. This is where arts-based learning offers today’s business organizations a distinct advantage. As the frequency of non-routine situations requiring tacit knowledge dramatically increases (according to Gartner Research, this number is in the process of doubling from 2006 to 2010), arts-based learning can fill the gap – providing workers in every industry the skills they need to create beautiful music together. And to build revenues and profits in the process (Peter Economy).

In conclusion, as you read this special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy* in the shadow of the present economic crisis, let me invite you to reflect upon the following questions:

Keywords:
Workplace learning,
Teaching methods,
Leadership development,
Strategy,
Leadership,
Management training

- Is your strategic thinking shaped by a glass half-full view of history – an understanding that a recession is often a stimulus for innovation?
- If creativity drives innovation, where do you find your organization's creativity reserves?
- Faced with the strategic imperative of developing your organization's next generation of leaders, how can you continue to help leaders in your organization learn to leverage creativity against the economic adversity resultant from the present downturn?

This special edition of the *Journal of Business Strategy* will offer you insights to how arts-based learning may enable your strategic actions and the innovation upturn that you are being asked to deliver.

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