

# The Intersection of Art and Business

## A context for arts-based training and development in the workplace

by Linda Naiman

**To understand the process of creative genius, it is valid for business people to look at the model of the artist. The business of the artist is to create, navigate opportunity, explore possibility, and master creative breakthrough. We need to restore art, the creation of opportunity, to business. —Brandweek (1998)**

The worlds of the arts and business are formulating a new relationship, distinct from the traditional models of entertainment or sponsorship. As Miha Pogacnik, a concert violinist and cultural ambassador to Slovenia, argues: “The world of arts must be rescued out of the prison of entertainment and the world of business must be led out of the desert of dullness of meaning!” In this new relationship, art is a role model for business, since all great art pushes boundaries beyond the established norms. Thus, it can teach us about aesthetics, ambiguity, diversity, chaos, change, courage, and complexity. According to British aesthete, Sir Herbert Read, the artist’s task is to break through the limitations of previously codified knowledge, to lead humanity to the future.”

Businesses today want to break away from their limitations, aim higher, and be a creative force for the greater good of the world. We need the transformative experiences the arts give us to thrive in a world of change. In ancient cultures, the mystery schools put students through initiations to overcome fear, learn something about their true nature, and gain self-actualization (self-mastery). The arts give us a taste of the mystery and help make sense of the world.

The arts take us on adventures in creative expression that help us explore safely unknown territory, overcome fear, and take risks. We can transfer these learning experiences to the workplace. Art-making has an alchemical effect on the imagination. Art takes people out of the realm of analytical thinking and into the realm of silence, reverie, and heightened awareness. In my own work with organizations, I’ve noticed this shift in consciousness creates a crucible for deep conversation, from which emerges trust, caring, camaraderie, and genius-level thinking. A shared art experience enhances our sense of belonging and enriches conversation.

From Chapter 2, [Orchestrating Collaboration at Work: Using music, improv, storytelling and other arts to improve teamwork](#), By Arthur B. VanGundy and Linda Naiman (Wiley 2003)

*The Harvard Business Review* (Feb 2004) made the astonishing statement that an MFA is the new MBA!"It reports that Businesses are realizing that the only way to differentiate their goods and services in today's overstocked, materially abundant marketplace is to make their offerings transcendent, physically beautiful and emotionally compelling. Metrics are not enough. In this market, the ability to conceptualize is strategically important. The economic future of an organization depends on its ability to create wealth by fostering innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Dan Pink, in his book [A Whole New Mind](#) (2005), argues that left-brain linear, analytical computer-like thinking are being replaced by right-brain empathy, inventiveness, and understanding as skills most needed by business. Pink points to Asia, automation, and abundance as the reasons behind the shift.

Pink says "Logical and precise, left-brain thinking gave us the Information Age. Now comes the Conceptual Age ruled by artistry, empathy, and emotion."

What does this mean for future jobs? Winners are designers, inventors, counselors, ethnographers, social psychologists, and other right-brain folks, while lawyers, engineers, accountants, and other left-brainers will see their jobs evaporate from outsourcing.

In reviewing [The Art of Business: Make All Your Work a Work of Art](#) (Davis, 2005) Tom Peters commented:

The authors persuasively argue that we are entering an economy which will value -insist upon! --a new way of looking at value creation. They call it moving from an emphasis on "economic flow" (input-output) to "artistic flow." The altered nature of enterprise, the "four elements" of new business thinking: "See yourself as an artist." "See your work as a work of art." "See your customers as an audience." "See your competition as teachers."

## **Arts-based learning**

We cannot find all the answers to our challenges in the world of the rational, logical, and scientific. Consequently the arts are emerging as a role model for business to adopt. Through art we can make it safe ask the deeper questions that lead to the emotional truth about a situation.

Art creates a bonding experience that facilitates collaboration and accelerates the ability get to the heart of a problem. Drawing or painting images illustrates how differently we

see things, and helps us appreciate that many points of view contribute to the whole. Images externalize the unconscious and make tacit knowledge visible.

Art-based activities can be used strategically to create safety, build trust, find shared values, and shift perceptions. Combining right-brain imagination with left-brain logic and analysis increases the capacity for breakthrough ideas and insights that lead to success.

## **What can we learn from the arts that we can apply to business?**

**Management is, above all, a practice where art, science, and craft meet.**

—Henry Mintzberg, author and professor at McGill University.

John Seely Brown, former director of PARC and chief scientist of Xerox Corporation says "There are three ways I look at [the impact of an art experience]. One is the notion that engaging in these types of activities evoke deeper responses, deeper emotions. It brings forth many of the tacitly held beliefs and assumptions that you have. So think of it as evocative of the tacit knowledge.

The second is that focused conversations are built and fused together around evocative objects that concern problems that the researcher has on his or her mind. I have said very often, it was the researcher that had the real problem, but the interaction with the artist actually made a big difference. Now that's a complex interplay, 'cause it takes over; it's like a conversation that unfolds over many months.

The third concerns the power of simplicity. Simplicity prior to complexity doesn't mean much. But simplicity, after you pass through the wall of complexity, after you have marinated in a fully nuanced reading of the situation and then rendering it in very simple ways is extraordinarily powerful.



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## Artists and business leaders have many parallels.

Both involve having a guiding vision, a potent point of view, formulating an ideal, navigating chaos and the unknown, and finally producing a new creation. They must be astute in assessing and developing talent, as well as making sure that the talent works well together. Executives, however, could learn from artists' ability to dare to break molds, lead changes in taste, raise funds, and be productive while being frugal.

— *Wall Street Journal* August 19, 2003

If the biggest challenges we face today concern global competition, managing change, and employee disengagement (to name a few), what can leaders do to inspire teams to achieve higher levels of performance? How can leaders tap into the hearts and minds of employees, to find the “burning platform” that mobilizes strategy into action? Innovation by its nature, demands change.

In [\*The Heart of Change\*](#), John Kotter states: "People change what they do less because they are given analysis that shifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings." He emphasizes that the central challenge is changing people's behavior and the way to change behavior is to influence their feelings. "The heart of change, is in the emotions."

Through art we can make it safe ask the deeper questions that lead to the emotional truth about a situation. Art creates a bonding experience that facilitates collaboration and accelerates the ability get to the heart of a problem. Drawing or painting images illustrates how differently we see things, and helps us appreciate that many points of view contribute to the whole. Images externalize the unconscious and make tacit knowledge visible.

When [\*Orchestrating Collaboration at Work\*](#) was first published I was invited by the Ginger Group Collaborative, to facilitate what I call arts-based dialogue. At the time they were a newly formed consortium of Organizational Development consultants, and were questioning whether they wanted to continue to invest time and energy in creating a new business venture based on collaborative strategic alliances, and if so; how. The group was interested in how I use art to stimulate creativity and enhance collaboration, and wanted to participate in painting processes “to get out of their heads” and access different ways of learning, which could be applied to their work.

The collaborative painting activities created a crucible for deeper levels of conversation, and “they found themselves telling stories of sensitive issues, personal journeys, and visions of their future. The retreat fostered open inquiry, sparked new energy, and ignited a sense of team spirit.” (Osborn)

One of the associates said “The paintings were a source of intimacy the group needs to stay together and provided a forum for rich and insightful dialogue. We realized that the

archetypes that emerged in the images of our painting represented the essence of what we wanted to convey about collaboration to our public.”

The story of how arts-based dialogue created a transformational experience for the Ginger Group is told by Susan M. Osborn, Ph.D in [Wake Me Up When the Data Is Over: How Organizations Use Stories to Drive Results.](#)

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## **To Use or Not to Use the Arts in Business**

Basically there are four options regarding Arts-in-Business:

1. Business uses the arts for decoration.
2. Business uses the arts for entertainment, either by giving the employees benefits such as tickets for selected shows, performances and arts exhibitions in their leisure time, or they invite artists into the company for performances at annual meetings, customer events or special occasions.
3. Business applies the arts as instruments for teambuilding, communication training, leadership development, problem solving and innovation processes.
4. Business integrates the arts in a strategic process of transformation, involving personal development and leadership, culture and identity, creativity and innovation, as well as customer relations and marketing.  
— Lotte Darsø, *Artful Creation* (2004)

## **Organizations using the arts in training and development**

Terry McGraw, chairman and CEO of The McGraw Hill Companies, characterizes creativity as a “business imperative,” and puts his companies’ successful experiences with arts-based learning in a broad strategic context of “surfacing creativity” through engagement with the arts.

Creativity is essential because it is at the heart of innovation, and innovation is a growth driver and, therefore, a business imperative. That is why, for several years, The McGraw-Hill companies has been using arts-based learning as a training tool in several key leadership initiatives...the arts have served as a complementary vehicle to more traditional learning approaches. They have helped to change attitudes by letting employees confront their assumptions in a nontraditional and non-intimidating environment....The results of using arts-based learning and training have been very positive for The McGraw-Hill

Companies...Arts-based training is part of an overall strategy and commitment of the corporation to help surface creativity  
— [\*Journal of Business Strategy\*](#) (Seiffter, 2005)

The McGraw Hill Companies is a global pioneer in the use of arts-based learning to train leaders, help employees solve problems creatively, and foster personal growth.

Keith Weed, Chairman, Lever Fabergé sees employee involvement as a key part of developing and sustaining an innovative and creative business. Catalyst, their internal arts and creativity program “brings artists and arts organisations into the business to motivate, inspire, challenge and unlock the potential of our staff, on both a professional and personal level. Artists and arts organisations come into the workplace to tackle specific business issues, from creative thinking to leadership styles and writing skills.”

Other companies who have used the arts for training purposes such as visioning, communication, customer service, and team development, include: American Express, AT&T, BBC, British Airways, Coca-Cola, Daimler-Chrysler, Dell Computers, Ericsson, Halifax, Hewlett Packard, Honeywell, IBM, Kodak, Lever Faberge, Lockheed Martin, Marks & Spenser, Mattel, Nike, Pfizer, Saatchi & Saatchi, Sears, Shell, Skandia, and the World Bank.

## **Forums for Art-based Learning:**

- Leadership and team development
- Strategic planning
- Values creation and meaningful work
- Appreciative inquiry and leading change
- Corporate retreats
- Meetings and Think Tanks
- Capacity building in creativity and innovation
- Brand development

## **Learning Outcomes & Benefits:**

- Art is a potent catalyst for a deeper inquiry into business issues, providing the means for ‘artful reflection’ in organizational development.
- Create a shared vision. Find shared values quickly and without aggravating debate.
- Prototype possibilities for developing new products/services.
- Rehearse “what if” options that lead to meaningful insights regarding change.
- Creativity and innovation skills development
- Aesthetic experience helps leaders make tacit knowledge visible; e.g. patterns, processes and relationships.

- Art-making processes help nurture relationships between dissimilar groups, fostering an appreciation for diverse and pluralistic points of view.
- Art is the antidote to information overload AND to the pressure of always being in control.
- Employee engagement

Here's what university managers and staff members said about painting in an arts-based training session for innovation:

- Reluctance turned into pleasant anticipation.
- Great leveler. It didn't matter how important or knowledgeable you are.
- A great self-discovery process. Better way to communicate through visual images and symbols.
- Fantastic technique for building relationships and creating an environment of collaboration.
- A great way to stimulate right-brain/ be playful and get into a different space.

Albert Gibson, R&D Manager at a US-based multi-national Food & Beverage Company wrote to me after reflecting on his art experience at a corporate retreat workshop I conducted:

If you want something really important to be done you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must satisfy the heart also... For those who would ask, '... and just how does art benefit my business?', I would offer, "If your business has important, pioneering work to do, then develop artful capabilities in your associates just as well as technical skills, else you'll work at half-strength at best, and risk losing all the benefit of their passion." Now, there is a connection between art and the bottom line.



**Linda Naiman** is a creativity and innovation expert, recognized globally for pioneering arts-based learning, as a catalyst for transformation in business. She advises senior leaders and managers on how to develop creativity and innovation in employees, to improve business performance, as well as foster an organizational culture that supports innovation. Her consulting is informed by principles and practices of business, arts, design, and social science research. Organizations which have sought out Linda for her expertise include the US Navy, GE, American Express, RBC, AstraZeneca, and Intel. Linda is co-author with Arthur B. VanGundy of "Orchestrating Collaboration at Work Using Music, Improv, Storytelling, and Other Arts to Improve Teamwork" (first published by Wiley in 2003).

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