

(Re)Educating for Leadership: How the Arts Can Improve Business

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(Re)Educating for Leadership: How the Arts Can Improve Business

There's no shortage of articles describing how business can learn from the arts, but, so far, few companies have taken arts-based training beyond simple skills development and into strategic thinking and major change. So when Keith Weed, the chairman of Lever Fabergé in England, says in a public meeting, with the minister for the arts in attendance, "I would cut my advertising and public relations budgets before I'd cut Catalyst," it shows a rare commitment to a program that doesn't have a clear, direct link to the bottom line. That he's talking about an arts-based program makes it even more unusual.

In an era of constant change, where tried-and-true business methods can leave a company gasping in the vapor trails of its competitors, the arts can help people reframe their environments, see things anew, and thereby increase discovery. But it is not really "the arts" that are necessary; it is the aesthetic approach to observing and thinking that the artistic process can help develop. The need for a new approach arises, in part, because of the similarity in training that today's leaders have experienced, both in school and on the job. There has been a heavy emphasis on linear, quantitative, results-oriented thinking. That is an essential quality for business leaders, but if it completely dominates other approaches and perspectives, the leaders can become one-dimensional, using only a small portion of their abilities.

Howard Gardner is chair of the Steering Committee for Project Zero at Harvard, perhaps the best-known educational research lab in the United States. Gardner is well known for his theory of multiple intelligences. "Across business sectors and functions, the full range of

intelligences should be employed. This assertion challenges the prevailing idea that there is a single ‘business intelligence’—an assumption rarely made explicitly, but entrenched in a ‘business school way of thinking.’ . . . Business schools highlight linguistic and logical intelligences, and students who excel in these areas are recruited by major corporations. . . . A person who can use several intelligences together is more likely to be wise, because a greater number of faculties and factors will have entered into the equation” (Gardner 197, 133).

This article will explain why Keith Weed has confidence in the arts to invigorate the culture in his organization, and will offer ideas for other firms intrigued by innovation and culture change stimulated by arts-based activities. Stories often provide the most memorable proofs, so we will first offer two case studies of successful uses of the arts in business situations. We will then present a sampling of interdisciplinary research about the effects of the arts.

Following the interdisciplinary research, we look at what the successes have in common, in hopes that they will lead others to further experiments and investigations.

Are There Proven Successes?

Two successful programs stand out in how they encourage participants to let the arts directly and indirectly influence their day-to-day activity: two divisions of Unilever outside London in the United Kingdom and the M.B.A. program at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Both programs aspire to improve the quality of thinking and decision-making that lead to success in business, not to teach anyone to be an artist. Both recognize an individual’s need to be creative, to be aware of behaviors and the effect of behaviors on colleagues and fellow students. Both teach that it’s OK to think differently, and to experience failure and learn from it.

Unilever

Unilever launched a new business strategy in 1999. One component was to establish greater creativity and initiative among the firm's people and throughout its operating companies.

Unilever's U.K. divisions were following a global corporate directive to develop an Enterprise Culture and encourage greater entrepreneurship among its employees. The means of implementing the directive in different countries and cultures rested with the CEOs of Unilever's operating companies. In Lever Fabergé, Unilever's Home and Personal Care business, the new Enterprise Culture was partly expressed through Catalyst, which brought artists and arts organizations into the company to address business issues. For example, a photographer was brought in to broaden artistic vision, an important element in a consumer products company. Following two years of experience within Lever Fabergé, the program expanded into a second operating company, Birds Eye Wall's, which is now known as Unilever Ice Cream & Frozen Foods.

Catalyst's ambitions are higher than those of the vast majority of arts-in-business projects. The goal of addressing business problems is foremost. Each arts activity has a business goal, even though participants may view the activity as pure pleasure. Alastair Creamer, who heads the program, saw the range of arts activities as limitless from the outset. There would be courses, individual activities, and opportunities to volunteer in arts organizations. Since different individuals respond to different creative means, and complementary insights can be derived from different arts, Unilever wanted to offer multiple options for creative activity. Catalyst has used visual arts, poetry, photography, playwriting, circus performance, jazz, and more. Many venues are offered, too, ranging from lunchtime activities to evening events in London to arts courses.

The arts activities—which are mostly voluntary—are evaluated within the overall goal of a recognized change in corporate culture, attitude toward work, and overall willingness to be innovative and experimental. Unilever realized that quantitative proof of the program’s success would be difficult to come by, so it accepted the idea that the process of evaluation would be observation and personal storytelling or anecdote. In its early days, Catalyst brought in energy, creativity, inspiration, and an external perspective, but the goals for improving the business were imprecise. Since then, the goals have evolved to focus on four areas: mindsets, behaviors, communication skills, and wider business issues. Creamer and the visiting artists determine which arts, presented in which way, best match the business issues to be addressed.

Most attempts to use the arts in business programs are one-time, one-art activities, for example, bringing in improvisational actors to increase comfort with thinking on your feet. Such programs can bring benefits, but they are customarily viewed as discrete activities, not as integrated elements in a plan for major corporate change, as in Unilever.

Putting the personal stories of Unilever employees together best reveals the high ambitions of the Catalyst program.

Addressing Innovation

Sean Gogarty became active with Catalyst when he headed Unilever’s Innovation Center in Kingston-on-Thames, with regional responsibility for Western Europe. He has since become Unilever’s brand development director for household cleaners in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. Gogarty became active in Catalyst by requesting a poet-in-residence for his group. When poet Jackie Wills began her six months at the Innovation Center, Gogarty did not have any narrow business goals for her to fulfill. Rather, he recognized that “creativity is the key to reframing the market,” especially in low-growth areas. The creative reframing

requires a “discontinuous step,” which can best be reached through the mind of the artist. Gogarty especially requested a poet, rather than a photographer or a visual artist, for example, because of the importance of words in his field. So his goal was to change the way he and his colleagues thought about products. As Gogarty says, “For big solutions that can change product lines, you have to work on big problems.”

Sean Gogarty brought the poet into Unilever’s Innovation Center to change the way people think. Many leaders would hesitate to bring in an artist to address such a seemingly vague “problem,” but this type of situation may be where the arts can have their greatest impact. Lever Fabergé has a strong, stable culture; many employees have been there for much of their working lives. But the background of the staff is fairly homogeneous, so an expansion of viewpoints can be of significant corporate value.

Jackie Wills had business experience as a journalist, so she understood the sensibilities on both the arts and business sides, which put her in good stead when one of her goals was “jargon-busting.” “Finding artists with the appropriate background or understanding is not easy,” confirms Tim Stockil, director of creative development at Arts & Business. His U.K. organization matches the needs of businesses with the right artists. The difficulty of finding the proper skills is why he runs courses that teach some basics of business communications to artists. It is rare for artists already to have an understanding of business and its terminology, as Wills did.

Wills comments on the “enormous courage” needed by Gogarty, or any executive, to bring in a poet to address business issues. She also comments on Gogarty’s unique approach, where he put her right onto a working project team. Of course, results are not always rosy. At the Innovation Center, Wills’s success with the staff was mixed, but Gogarty found that one-on-

one work with the poet led him to substantially new ways of thinking; the result was a success for the leader, a partial success for the staff.

Focusing on Major Business Issues

In another situation Creamer brought in theater director Fiona Lesley and writer Chris Higgins with their established company of actors called The MAP Consortium to work on feedback and coaching. Lesley directed the actors in scenes from *King Lear* and several David Mamet plays as a starting point for looking at the feedback culture of the rehearsal process. The staff then took over the roles of director and actor, moving from theatrical scripts to live business discussions. MAP performers are placed on business teams to observe and offer advice on feedback as part of day-to-day behavior. Performances by MAP for the businesses then play back actual behaviors. The troupe was in residence full time at Unilever for three months. This program is now being rolled out across both companies with additional funding from Unilever and the British government, with a view toward its use in other companies.

Some of the artists brought in are consciously blending the arts. Art consultant Lucy Kimball, in a project called Stimulating Reflection, addressed a business issue by developing an experiential and emotional audit of how the business lived its stated behaviors on a day-to-day basis. This became a celebration of acknowledged role models, but also made some people uneasy as a video documented behavior within Lever Fabergé that was not always complimentary. In effect, Kimball visualized for the business the gap between aspirational behaviors and those being lived.

Part of the project Stimulating Reflection included placing on each floor of the building floor mats with statements related to the business's desired behaviors: Step on this if you are not having fun today; Step on this if you have let a colleague down today; Step on this if this is

the place to be today; Step on this if you have taken a risk today; Step on this if bureaucracy got in your way today; Step on this if you have a passion for winning today. People were urged to step (or jump) on the saying that matched their mood. Sensors recorded the number of “landings.” The different mats rotated on five floors and the results of the “hits” on different floors indicated unofficially how the atmosphere varied throughout the building. Another aspect of the project asked employees who in the company best exemplified various positive traits. Then the results were posted publicly. This is a strong and controversial presence that some saw as “naming and shaming” rather than celebrating the best. Since this project, however, the business has stepped up its commitment to behavioral change, particularly with senior management.

Often a business issue can be addressed in a way that does not seem related to business at all. Leanne Gorin, a household categories operations manager, chose not to participate in Catalyst projects because she couldn't see how it would benefit her. And everything seemed so tied to the business, whereas she wanted something far from her regular work. She finally joined a photography class. Although the workshop bore no resemblance to her day-to-day duties, she hoped it would teach her more about the creative side of her business, such as why decisions by the brand team often seem to take so long. The business was never discussed in the course, but Gorin learned, as she'd hoped, about taking risks and preparing yourself for creative decisions. Although the course seemed to Gorin, and others, to be completely separated from work, in fact one of its goals was to develop new ways of seeing, a necessity in a company like Lever Fabergé. After the course, Gorin, realizing the rewards of more creative endeavors, asked to be part of a brand development team.

Questioning Basic Practices

This article began with a quotation from Lever Fabergé's chairman, Keith Weed. Another senior executive active and visible with Catalyst is John Ballington, director of public and community affairs. "Catalyst is a two-way street," he says. "We learn from the arts and we give back as well," in part through volunteer programs that many participate in. Employees volunteer at many levels, bringing their business expertise to arts organizations. Ballington, for example, has joined the board of the Whitechapel Art Gallery. Involvement with organizations that are smaller and often not-for-profit "helps us see the possible simplicity in a strategy," says Ballington. Trying to apply Unilever business techniques and discovering how they have to be adapted stimulates different ways of thinking about their use at Unilever.

Volunteers who work in the arts often quickly learn the differences in both the language and perspective of their counterparts. James Frost, who has spent his career in marketing, has volunteered with two art galleries. He was able to bring a new perspective to them. For example, when one organization asked him to help with a new logo, he taught it how to see marketing with a more cohesive view. He helped people work as a team to develop a new vision and advised on how to apply that vision throughout the organization's marketing. In return, the galleries have challenged his preconceptions in several ways. Unilever seeks to project a totally consistent image of itself, but the Whitechapel Art Gallery must vary its image according to the current exhibition. Whitechapel's variations of image break a cardinal rule of Unilever marketing. "Business often talks about breaking the rules," Frost says, "but in fact it rarely does." The arts organizations also changed his view of the value of money, when he realized, for example, how far the money spent by Lever Fabergé to produce one television commercial would go if applied to publicity for a gallery. The arts further challenged his view of time. In business, he is time-driven, but the arts are more concerned with "getting it right" than with hitting the deadline. Of course he recognizes that the galleries are sensitive to

timing and Lever Fabergé insists on quality, but the mindset about these components varies significantly.

Others at Lever Fabergé speak of how arts programs have led them to question their values. For example, Matt Gayleard volunteered with a small design firm led by two graduates of the Royal College of Art. Summarizing his experience, he says, “Seeing their passion for their work made me question my integrity and values and wonder how much I’d put at stake for what I believe in. Working with them also made me realize how much I’ve learned at Lever Fabergé.” Others also speak of how working with artists, whether in activities or in volunteer situations, showed them how much they take for granted in their own work and lives.

Improved clarity of communication is the result of arts projects for a number of individuals, in both volunteer situations and organized programs. Steve Kearns, who manages sales for national accounts at Lever Fabergé, volunteered with Sadler’s Wells, the London dance venue, to improve its front-of-house sales. That includes such things as shop, bar, and program sales. Kearns not only improved current operations but worked to give the organization the skills it needed for continual improvement after he’d left. Still, Kearns feels he gained more than he gave. By evaluating the responses to his recommendations, he realized how often he succumbed to business-speak, and he saw the necessity for clear communication. He has since concentrated on this in his dealings with customers and consumers and believes his work is stronger because of it.

It’s interesting that Kearns was using business skills to teach the Sadler’s Wells staff to see things differently. How to see differently is just what the arts can teach business. Sometimes what is needed most is any perspective that differs significantly from business-as-usual and that can help remove institutional blinders. When the arts are the vehicle of change, they offer

maximum potential for developing new ways of seeing, based on enhanced emotional and intuitive response, in addition to the broadened fact-based response that Kearns taught at Sadler's Wells.

Jess Blandford, who works in home care strategy development, has participated in many of Lever Fabergé's arts offerings. Echoing Kearns, she said, "We hide behind the business code of language, a language that's stripped of passion." This dawned on her during a project with John Simmons, a writer and consultant. At the time she was writing the strategy for the laundry business. Since then she has made an effort to inject more passion and personality into all her writing, from strategy statements to e-mail messages, and believes it has improved her work and influenced the responses she receives from others.

When they began their volunteer activities, Kearns and Blandford did not know how those experiences would influence their work, but an experienced arts administrator who selects the volunteer offerings knows what specific business benefits to expect. He or she can explain the intent to the business executives who need to approve the arts-related program. When executives understand the expected benefits and so have a means to evaluate programs, they're much more likely to encourage courses, workshops, and volunteering. At Unilever, volunteers can even request one hour of volunteering each fortnight as part of their paid jobs.

Institutionalizing the Program

From the outset, organization and program leaders at Unilever agreed on the seriousness of the business purpose and saw the program as a necessary part of the environment. James Hill, chairman of Ice Cream & Frozen Foods, has stated in a discussion of how creativity and open-mindedness are instilled in people by Catalyst, "I want it to become a state of mind." When

support is that strong, the program will become established quickly with no sense of its being a fad. Catalyst is starting its fifth year.

Catalyst is funded from the human resources training budget and employs three people full-time across the two companies. It is the only project in the United Kingdom where business works at this level with the arts. According to Lotte Darsø and Michael Dawids of Learning Lab Denmark, who conducted a two-year search for the best arts-in-business programs throughout Europe and North America, this is the most extensive corporate arts program for staff participation that they have encountered.

When Catalyst began, Lever Fabergé's marketing staff participated more than other groups. It wasn't until the third year began that significant interest was apparent from the IT and finance people and the customer teams. This was a two-way street. The IT people were saying, "OK, you're still around. Maybe I should check you out." At the same time, Catalyst had become more relevant to them as Creamer had come to understand business issues they valued. It takes time to build trust, especially when there's such a lack of familiarity at the outset. The two years of courtship were necessary to bring everyone on board. As an example of how far they've come, Creamer is now working with the in-house customer teams to devise programs that address twenty-first-century relationships. Actors, directors, and standup comedians use improvisational techniques with staff to explore varieties of customer relationships.

Catalyst fits within people's regular work and social structures. Disruption is at a minimum. Public performances and showings help employees see the program as an accepted, regular part of business life, creating a feeling of normalcy and acceptance, unlike, for example, a week's retreat that is apart from the work setting. Also, there is a major difference between a project led by someone from outside and one led by a full-time staff member. The continual

presence of Catalyst's leader, Alastair Creamer, at Unilever increases the familiarity that aids acceptance.

Funding and Support

The way funding is handled influences how people feel about the project. What is the supporting body? Does the nature of the support make the value of the artists clear? Catalyst is budgeted by Human Resources, not a separate arts budget. It is viewed as complementary to traditional training, showing recognition of the changed perspective on the arts. As Catalyst has evolved, so has its funding, which originally came all from the corporate HR budget. Now if a particular division funds a course because it addresses a need, that division's training budget will provide funding.

In addition to evaluation by interviews with participants, Lever Fabergé has six individuals who have been designated as "catalyzers." Their role is to observe the reactions to Catalyst, both of those people joining activities and those not joining. Catalyzers are chosen to be representative of the total staff. Some have participated frequently; others have remained skeptical of the program. One catalyzer is brand manager Ali Morris. Before becoming a catalyzer she had gained an appreciation of Catalyst, but participated very little. By listening to those around her, she was able to help the program by urging Creamer to say more about what to expect from each activity. Many activities were just being announced, but employee discomfort with the unknown made some hesitate to sign up. By explaining more clearly what the participant would get out of it, Catalyst started to do a better sales job. Morris adds that Catalyst has made a fundamental difference in the environment. As one example, she mentions a quiet colleague who sits working at her computer all day. Through her work in a Catalyst project, she's displayed a creative side that her coworkers never knew existed, and through the course and a conversation with the chairman about her work, her confidence has

grown as well. She sees herself differently, and her colleagues now recognize her as the multidimensional, talented person she is.

Edginess

At Lever Fabergé, Catalyst's first project was to mount an art collection throughout the main staircase in the organization's six-story building. Alongside the pictures, large, colorful quotations from employees recorded their reactions to the art. As Creamer notes, "This was not an art gallery. This was a busy stairway, so the normal rules of how you display and describe art were not really applicable. This was an opportunity for employees to say publicly what they liked, or didn't, about a particular work. We realized that sometimes the comments would be more striking than the work itself."

At the beginning of the stairway is a wall of inspiration, containing quotations from people who have participated in Catalyst activities. It's hard to ignore a wall with such comments as: "It was great to be a part of something where different views was the point, not the problem." "I had no idea what I couldn't do." "The longer I looked, the more I saw." "Lever Fabergé does not connect us—being people does." And "I've started listening to backing vocals, looking at shadows, watching nonspeaking characters on TV. I'm looking beyond and behind things. I don't know what this means yet."

In several instances, Catalyst has pushed the boundaries of propriety. Its initial art display included photos that were interpreted by some as pornographic. Catalyst polled the staff on their appropriateness, and on the basis of the vote the pictures were removed. Yet this type of edginess and controversy draws some people into the program. A delicate balance must be maintained. At Unilever, Creamer is being invited more and more to work with management committees. On one level this can be seen as the ultimate compliment, as acceptance into the

mainstream of the company's work. Yet Jess Blandford recognizes that the edginess of Catalyst is one of its strongest appeals to her and others. She believes Creamer has to avoid becoming too corporate. Creamer, recognizing this danger, has refused to take a permanent position. He and his two assistants, Isabelle King and Katherine Mellor, work on renewable one-year contracts.

Babson College

The F. W. Olin Graduate School of Business at Babson College inaugurated a new M.B.A. curriculum eleven years ago. Centered on the theme of entrepreneurial management in a changing global environment, the new two-year M.B.A. replaced all functional courses in the first year with an integrated, modular approach that follows the life cycle of a business. The first module, Creative Management in Dynamic Organizations, addresses the beginning of the product life cycle.

The creativity stream, one component of the first module (or the first five weeks of the program), was designed to engage first-year M.B.A. students in the creative process by exposing them to artistic modes of expression. Creativity is also emphasized in other parts of the first module, in more standard business courses on leadership, law, and ethics. Through exposure to the creative process, students learn how to apply creative principles to managerial situations. The designers of the new M.B.A. also believed that the arts courses should run concurrently with business courses, and that the business professors had to be sensitive to the arts activities going on as they encouraged creativity in their own courses.

Bill Lawler, leadership professor of accounting and strategy at Babson and associate dean of the MBA program, says that, "The creativity stream sets the tone for the whole program."

This is the kind of top-level support that Mary Pinard needs. Pinard, a poet and member of the

Arts and Humanities Department, is director of the creativity stream. An arts-based approach to creativity may not be right for every business school, but where one of the catchphrases is “Ambiguity is your friend,” this approach fits ideally.

From the beginning of Babson’s new M.B.A. program, a range of administrative and faculty leaders—from both management and liberal arts— has been involved with the creativity stream, as has a group of working artists every year. In the early stages of the new design, professors in management and international business worked side by side with professors in philosophy and the arts to imagine how creativity and imagination, ethics, and management could be integrated to greatest effect across the four modules of the first year.

To Liberate, Rescue, Nurture, and Educate the Imagination

Al Anderson, professor of philosophy and consultant during the early days of redesign, has said, “Imagination is an essential function in all human consciousness. Our ability to use language, to think through forms, patterns, shapes, metaphors, etc., and our unique kind of consciousness that allows us to transcend time and place, all grow from our imagination.” Ten years ago, Anderson saw a prejudice against imagination crippling this ability. “This is why a senior member of the M.B.A. management faculty complained at the time about his students’ lack of creative thinking in their attempt to become entrepreneurs. So, liberating, rescuing, nurturing, and educating the imagination is essential if we are to do more than repeat yesterday’s patterns. That is the function of the arts.”

The designers of the program felt strongly not only that student exposure to the arts should be hands-on, but also that it should be directed by working artists who represent a range of disciplines. From the inception of the creativity stream, a variety of artists and artistic media have been featured in order to offer the richest possible exposure to creative processes.

Although the blend of artistic modes has changed over the years, there have always been at least six artists working with the students, representing everything from design to photography. For the last four years, the combination of puppetry, movement, music, fiction writing, improvisation, painting, and poetry has been particularly effective. To maximize students' exposure to discovery, ambiguity, new ways of seeing, and risk-taking, they are randomly assigned to creativity groups. The primary goal over the course of the five-week experience is for students to (re)discover the power inherent in their own creativity.

Although students are randomly placed in one of the groups and thus focus on one particular medium, there is enough curiosity about having artists in the M.B.A. curriculum to encourage sharing among the groups about what exactly is going on. When Pinard meets with her poetry groups, they're abuzz with stories about what they happened to see as they passed by the improvisation group's rehearsal; or they want to know how they can be as expressive and physical in their poetry as the painters seem to be in their visual experiments; or they've heard that the movement group isn't using traditional dance as much as everyday physical movement expressed with emotion and rhythm; and how is it possible that the music group is building rhythmic instruments with materials retrieved from a trash bin or purchased at Home Depot? These questions and observations enhance students' notions of the creative process—its uncertainty, messiness, and, perhaps most importantly, its pleasantly disruptive presence in the M.B.A. classrooms—and offer them alternative ways of thinking and acting, not only in their own explorations of poetry, but also in their other M.B.A. classes.

Self-Discovery

During interviews at Babson, the students consistently noted how the creativity consultants never give directions. Each one always guides the teams within each group to their own discoveries. That is all part of the training to embrace ambiguity, take risks, and develop as a

team. M.B.A. student Felipe Venegas explained how the business professors then carry this type of ambiguity and self-discovery into their questions and exams. He thinks of Babson's professors as the ideal of "perpetual students"—they are consistently learning, then adjusting and improving what they do.

Venegas is a driven individual who leads a very structured life. He likes everything planned out as thoroughly as possible. Thanks to his fiction group, he recognizes that that is not the way most business problems arise and are solved. Venegas was so frustrated by the lack of firm direction by his instructor that, late in the project, he berated his teammates for their lack of focus and their likely need for a last-minute rush to complete the project. By the end of the course, though, he so fully understood the intent of creativity consultant Carolyn Megan that, during the final group presentations, he publicly apologized to her. Recognizing that you can't always have a firm structure, especially at the start, Venegas now finds it much easier to begin new research, cases, and papers without having the finished product planned from the outset. Venegas, an experienced financial planner, reflecting on his business experience, recognized that he had lost at least one customer because he didn't understand that customer's viewpoint. He now knows the importance of adapting as you go along and of seeing from the perspective of people you're working with.

Dan Goodman tells of an early exercise in his fiction-writing group. Students were asked to look at a painting and describe it from the perspective of one of the people in it. Next they were asked to do the same from the perspective of another character in the scene. Then they were asked to do it again, but didn't have to choose a human; they could choose the perspective of an object. The writing exercise, according to Goodman, helped students get "beyond tolerance to understanding—you enter someone else's world." Goodman spoke of how applicable this is to business and said that recently Professor John Shank in his cost

accounting class had been using the technique of adapting to different individual perspectives to resolve a conflict.

Second-year M.B.A. candidate Caleb Winder tells of developing essential listening skills through his experiences with the improvisation group. Winder had avoided theatrical activities of any kind ever since a well-meaning elementary teacher forced him to take a part that wound up embarrassing him. But just before enrolling in Babson he read a book about the importance of improvisation in business and recognized that it could help him in his high-tech sales position. He believes the improv group increased his confidence and his willingness to let someone else take the lead in conversation, an important quality for an aggressive salesman or any business leader. “You learn to focus on the present and adapt to the needs of what others are saying, not to be thinking three steps ahead” and forcing the conversation to go in your planned direction.

Thinking in Fresh Ways

According to Allan R. Cohen, Edward A. Madden Distinguished Professor of Global Leadership and member of the original curriculum design team, “At Babson we believe that seeing new opportunities, new ways of doing things—which is the heart of entrepreneurial leadership—is just what anyone making art does. Whatever the artistic medium, the artist faces the ‘blank canvas,’ and has to combine disparate elements to make a new poem, painting, dance, or play. When teaching entrepreneurial thinking, it isn’t enough to explain that the leader has to come up with something that is both valuable to others and unique. Practicing that process is fundamental—and making art is a perfect parallel. It is one of several ways Babson M.B.A. students learn to think in fresh ways.” M.B.A. candidate Noah Gordon tells how his music group did not use traditional instruments, focusing instead on roughly made instruments and various percussive sounds. As Cohen and Gordon would both

say, this teaches that business solutions can come from unusual sources, and there are far more possible solutions than you first recognize.

Alvaro Sande, a student from Chile who has followed the path of three cousins by attending Babson, also developed an important business skill without even realizing he was doing it. He speaks of the Chilean culture as being one in which emotion and anger are much more accepted than in the international business world. He sees the greatest benefit from his work with Larry Coen, creativity consultant for the improvisation group, to be the sense of relaxation, openness, and acceptance that Coen instilled in the students. "He taught us to take what's given to us and how to work with it." During the course, Alvaro never thought of this sense of relaxation being connected to business. It was only in thinking about it afterward that he recognized the relevance.

How relaxed and accepting did Sande become? In his final improv presentation before a couple of hundred people, audience members determined the situations to be acted out. Sande and another man in the course were placed by an audience member in an extremely embarrassing situation. As Sande explained, not only would they not have been able to improvise such an outrageous scene at the start of the creativity stream, no one in the class would have dared to make such a request. Immersion in an art truly can alter behavior by increasing a willingness to try and potentially accept divergent views.

M.B.A. candidate Denise Chew explains how her team within Babson's painting group developed a collage that expressed their feelings about September 11, which occurred shortly after their class began. They created a large collage of the American flag with images of appropriate subjects in red, white, and blue. The group as a whole then chose to emphasize the emotional element in its end-of-course presentation by staging its works in a black-walled

dance studio, funneling the spectators individually into the space with the art, giving them time to reflect on what they were seeing, then leading them into an auditorium. After all had seen and considered the collages, the student-artists took questions and discussed their work. The importance of seeking an emotional as well as an intellectual response is making its way into some business courses, but is still rarely addressed sufficiently.

Does the creativity carry over to other coursework? Student Karen Williams explains that everyone has to write a paper at the end of the first module of courses. “About 40 to 45 percent chose not to write a typical paper. They used cartoons, fiction, poetry—they were able to take risks that most wouldn’t have taken prior to the course.” Dan Goodman speaks of a team in an IT course that chose to explain the differences between LANS and WANS and other types of networks by staging a play. The team members became members of a family, each with different networking needs. In the play, a consultant visited the family and explained what each person needed and how they could work together.

According to Marlena Yannetti, professor of dance at Emerson College and creativity consultant in movement for the creativity stream, “Invariably, my area is regarded as anathema by most M.B.A.s. As a result, our first meeting is attended with much trepidation and apprehension. The participants usually look upon me with a ‘what have I gotten myself into?’ attitude. When I tell them that they will finally and ultimately enjoy the process and resulting project presentation, they stare in mute disbelief. This happens every time! They resist—I implore, cajole, insist; after the final project presentations, they are delighted, beaming and finally understand the process. I think that because movement involves an instrument (the body) that is intensely personal, they feel extremely vulnerable. This very vulnerability is what creates the ‘high’ that occurs when each of them becomes part of a very strong and focused whole, willing to take risks and ‘work the wire.’ I love it!”

Teamwork

Babson's M.B.A. program is built on teamwork. The entire first module emphasizes the importance of collective creativity, of embracing ambiguity, and of group risk taking.

Margaret Safford, when asked whether her painting group, which really seemed to be a course in visual design, had changed her thinking, replied, "It's impossible to tell because of the integrated nature of the coursework. The creativity courses are just the kickoff point."

Integration with other coursework at Babson and conscious application of principles in regular work at Unilever are essential to going beyond simple skill building.

The creativity stream builds camaraderie and establishes important principles that continue to be developed over the two-year program. As Dan Goodman explains, the use of teamwork in the creativity stream quickly undermines the idea, held by some students, that entrepreneurship is an activity for Lone Rangers.

Teamwork requires an understanding and acceptance of coworkers. Many students at Babson commented on the benefits of learning more about their colleagues. Because the subject matter is so far from business, they learn about depths and sides of their classmates that they would probably never see in regular classwork. Karen Williams spoke of a classmate from Egypt who was with her in Babson's poetry group. His normal behavior was formal and his style of speaking was often curt. Yet in the poetry group, she saw an emotional depth in him that made her appreciate him so much more than she might have in a regular classroom. This deeper interaction gave the two a personal advantage when they were later placed together on an extended business-project team. As his poetry-group project, the young man wrote and recited an epic poem in his native language, showing a huge range of emotion and impressing classmates with the beauty of his presentation.

A Sense of Importance

Babson tries to make both students and the public aware of the importance of the arts program by making it a required course in the first module for two-year M.B.A. students. Also, just as Creamer is a continual presence at Unilever, Babson's Pinard is a full-time faculty member with an office on campus. All of the other creativity consultants, who are considered outside consultants rather than adjunct faculty, work as artists and educators, four in the greater Boston area, and two in Portland, Maine. Funding for the creativity stream, including the consulting fees for the artists, has been a regular part of the two-year M.B.A. program budget.

The seriousness of the creativity stream's business purpose is now accepted at Babson, where the program has been running for eleven years. Pinard notes, however, a delay in getting participation from skeptical faculty members. In the first several years, the faculty attending end-of-class presentations were primarily those who helped create the program and those teaching in it. Faculty teaching other business streams now attend the M.B.A. creativity presentations, express pride in student accomplishments, and often approach Pinard afterward to discuss what they've seen.

An impressive student commitment is revealed when students watch the presentations by their peers, typically fourteen presentations over two days, two in each medium. As students observe their peers' presentations, they report feeling awe and pride: they are amazed at what their peers have grasped in such a short time about the nature of music, or movement, or poetry, and they are also full of pride, since they, like their peers, have worked through obstacles to find themselves willing and able to express their discoveries about the creative process. Some students are so inspired by what they see and experience over the course of the final presentations that they seek to continue regular meetings with their creativity group even

after the stream has ended. Inspired by the performances that end the classes, one group of musically talented students has met several more times for public performances.

One year, the M.B.A. creativity presentations happened to coincide with an international meeting of entrepreneurs at Babson. It was remarkable, Pinard reports, to see a group of entrepreneurs emerging from their meeting room and spilling into the café, where a movement presentation was taking place: M.B.A. students moving freely, rhythmically, winding through the tables and chairs, rearranging the onlookers' sense of the space and its purpose. While demonstrating to the visiting entrepreneurs Babson's particular approach to creativity in entrepreneurial education, the students' presentation to the visitors also created a sense of presence and prominence for the creativity stream.

Creativity in a Corporate Setting

Babson has used similar programs in business and the arts with executive education clients. Creativity workshops tailored to the needs of executives—and also featuring poetry, music, improvisation, and painting—have been used successfully at Babson's on-campus Center for Executive Education in programs custom designed for companies such as Aetna, Siemens, and Lucent. In addition, Babson has implemented a parallel creativity stream in its new Fast Track online M.B.A. programs. Although there are particular challenges to adapting creativity and the arts for an online educational environment, early indications are that the creativity stream has been a success in both on-campus executive education and online M.B.A. programs.

Matt Alford, a senior technical marketing engineer at Intel, after completing the Babson/Intel M.B.A. program that transferred the creativity stream to the online setting combined with some face-to-face work, says, "The creative process exercises have changed my daily life.

The way I approach problem solving is different now. When I started the creativity exercises, I was tired, under a lot of stress, and having difficulty completing a project at work. The creativity stream pushed me into activities that allowed me to approach routine problems with seemingly unrelated, yet useful and effective, ways of finding creative solutions. After spending time with the creativity consultants, away from the office, away from my usual routine and environment, I developed a renewed appreciation for the process of creating. The art and creativity project has helped reinforce the idea that we need to employ new methods if we want new results.” Alford wished the creativity stream had continued throughout the Babson coursework because it would “have broken up the finance grind and balanced our M.B.A. experience a little better.”

Facing Challenges

Introducing artists into an M.B.A. program has its challenges. Early on, when Pinard was looking to hire what were being called “creativity consultants” to guide the M.B.A. students through a hands-on experience with the creative process, she found herself gravitating toward working artists she knew personally. Although this approach allowed quick access to a number of artists, she soon realized that not all artists—or artistic media—are appropriate for this kind of program.

During the first years, she hired photographers, videographers, architect/designers, and theater directors, in addition to artists on the faculty at Babson: one poet and one fiction writer. But not all fully understood the unique business-oriented intent of the program. Also, it took no time at all to realize that the relatively high cost of tools and materials in photography and videography and the need for solid basic skills simply to operate equipment effectively made these media less adaptable to the program. Design was a good bet, but after about two years, Pinard lost her design consultants and was unable to sustain anyone new in this area. Theater

seemed as if it would work well, but Pinard found that most directors preferred a “traditional” approach to directing: thus, students were required to learn lines from a well-known play, instead of, for example, imagining new ways to approach dramatization and its potential for transformation. Early experiments with professors of music were less successful than hoped, in part because of the pedagogy involved in teaching students to play instruments.

Through it all, Pinard and her advisers were realizing that what they really wanted and needed in instructors was a fresh approach to teaching and demonstrating creative process, *in addition* to expertise in particular media. Pinard asserts that the ability to explain and model the principles of an artistic medium and explain it to what many would consider an unlikely audience—M.B.A. students—are essential for the success of the Babson program. The program needed artists who could find a point of departure for the M.B.A.s, and who could push them, gently yet firmly, into areas of discomfort, risk-taking, discovery, and finally transformation.

Ambiguity by Design

According to Allan Cohen, “Our MBA program aims at developing entrepreneurial leaders, capable of anticipating, initiating, and managing change. It wants graduates who are innovative and can make things happen, wherever they are in organizations. This necessitated a complete redesign of the curriculum, building it from business problems out rather than from disciplines. The design team believed that it was critical to jolt students’ ways of thinking about business issues and about learning, and decided that an early arts experience and working in teams could provide the requisite unsettling but exciting stimulus.” That unsettling or uncomfortable feeling when the creativity stream begins is a common thread running through student accounts of their experiences, and the discomfort is often caused by

ambiguity. It appears to prepare them well for the unsettled world of business, where the uncertainty of the future creates the greatest opportunities for significant added value.

Babson administrators and faculty knew that the creativity stream couldn't be evaluated alone, since it was designed to be a part of a whole. They acknowledged that success would be determined by how the graduate program was viewed in a world dominated by Harvard, Wharton, and Stanford. For the last ten years, their graduate business program has been ranked number one in the country for entrepreneurship by *U.S. News and World Report* in its well publicized annual survey of business schools.

Why Arts-Related Experiences Lead to Positive Change

Few will make claims as dramatic as Leonard Shlain: Art is “not only . . . an aesthetic that can be pleasing to the eye, but [also] a Distant Early Warning system of the collective thinking of a society. Visionary art alerts the other members that a conceptual shift is about to occur in the thought system used to perceive the world” (Shlain, p. 18). It is appealing to think that way, but, despite Shlain's extensive research, it is certainly not proven. Looking at the smaller scale to demonstrate the influence of the arts, many scientists have credited the arts as a source of their inspiration.

For example, Einstein, when frustrated with physics, would play the violin or piano, “and and that would usually resolve all his difficulties,” writes his son. Jared Diamond attributes “his ability to identify bird songs to his musical training.” Mitchell Feigenbaum, a cocreator of chaos theory, says, “What artists have accomplished is realizing there's only a small

amount of stuff that's important and then seeing what it was.' . . . Consequently, he does much of his scientific research in art museums" (Root-Bernstein, pp. 61, 89-90).

These anecdotes, like the apparent successes of the Babson and Unilever programs, need to be placed in a theoretical context. Observation is not enough. The arts apparently have had a strong impact on those who have participated, but why? And isn't there a way the change in individuals can be measured?

Arnold Packer, a former U.S. assistant secretary of labor, is a respected economist and labor expert and a Fellow at Johns Hopkins for Policy Studies. In a cleverly titled article, "Arts and Learning a Living," he discusses "Marrying the Arts and Workplace Know-how." He cites three areas in which the arts influence life-long learning:

1. "Experiences in the arts teach skills that can be transferred to the workplace." (He cites allocating resources, interpersonal skills, many skills relating to information, understanding systems, and selecting, using, and troubleshooting technology.)
2. "Knowledge of the arts enhances effective communication."
3. Arts experience leads to "an 'artful' approach to problem-solving." (For example, balancing diverse considerations, weighing intangibles, and systems thinking.) (Packer, 107-109)

This is a useful categorization of benefits provided by the arts: skills, communication, and problem solving. When the arts are brought into businesses in ways that go beyond sponsorship or beautifying the environment, they are usually intended to improve skills and aspects of communication. These are tactical, predictable improvements. Many of the Unilever and Babson experiences, viewed individually, enhance skills and communications

ability. Packer's third area, problem solving, is strategic and unpredictable. Through the arts, we can improve our powers of thinking, of analysis, of problem solving and problem finding. This third area can have far greater impact than the first two, something Unilever and Babson have understood.

A single arts-based exercise or course can help skill development; continuing and challenging engagement with the arts can expand thinking and develop better problem solving. This is accomplished by increasing the emotional sensitivity to both self and others and through exposure to creative ideas and experiences that are foreign to day-to-day business life. These foreign experiences must be attended to with concentrated reflection, and this response must occur often enough to become accepted and typical behavior with the arts. It then needs to be consciously transferred to other situations. But before pursuing the benefits of an extensive aesthetic education, it's important to recognize why it is needed.

Isn't a Logical Perspective Enough?

Many scholars have noted how both education and practice lead people in many fields, including business, to believe wholeheartedly in a logical, linear, quantitative way of thinking and of responding to the world.

Simon Haines, an English professor at Australian National University, traces this way of thinking, as do many others, to the Enlightenment. "Enlightenment philosophy . . . is still mesmerized by a *'rationalistic conception of rationality,'*" which demands that "every decision . . . be based on grounds that can be discursively explained." Philosopher Bernard Williams finds this a common and frustrating trait of his fellow philosophers, who believe that morality is rational only if "it can be formulated in, or grounded on, a system of abstract principles." Such principles, applied "almost computationally," should be able to govern our

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moral lives, they say. But “the fact that some people feel they need such principles does not mean there *are* any” (Haines, 33). Jon Elster, a prolific social scientist from Columbia University, cites the need so many people have to find answers or meaning in everything, calling it “. . . a widespread tendency to *search* for *meaning* in all phenomena—a tendency that can express itself either as an attempt to *find* meaning or as an effort to *create* meaning” (Elster, 101). Many people seek THE ANSWER in a totally rational explanation, but it is rarely there.

Leaders in all fields are paid to find solutions to problems, to get results. A belief in an exclusively rational means of finding a solution can be comforting; it removes doubts that may be created by emotional or sensory responses or by ambiguity. Leaders often think they cannot afford to linger too long in uncertainties or doubts, but that pressure need for quick judgments and results often leads them to rushed decisions. The tendency is strong to quickly choose the most logical answer to a problem, and then to see the situation’s variables and conditions in light of that single anticipated solution. But this is not finding definitive proof; it is merely seeing what you want to see.

Time is needed to apply an aesthetic perspective, to define (or intuit) all the variables. Breadth of vision is needed to take in those variables relatively quickly. Leaders need to allow time and develop breadth of vision, two traits that are required when responding to arts.

Just as a leader making decisions totally dependent on logic may falter, a leader basing a decision totally on intuition or emotional response is likely to make a poor choice. Nor should the two perspectives be blended into a compromise. Compromises too often mute the strengths of alternative views. A challenge for the leader is to consider the fully rational and

the fully aesthetic simultaneously, thereby giving each perspective full scope and increasing the realm of possibility.

What Is an Aesthetic Response?

The aesthetic perspective one must apply when understanding the arts is what can lead to change. Aesthetics can be a confusing word because it is sometimes explained as an appreciation of beauty, sometimes as an appreciation of the arts, and sometimes as a heightened perception through the senses. We use it in the latter sense, much like Columbia University philosopher and expert in aesthetic education Maxine Greene, who calls it the field of philosophy “concerned about perception, sensation, and imagination, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world” (Greene, p. 5). Incorporating an aesthetics perspective alongside the more common “scientific” perspective allows judgments to be, as Gardner put it, “more likely to be wise, because a greater number of faculties and factors will have entered into the equation.”

Artists customarily have a more refined aesthetic awareness than most people. Poet Alberto Rios grew up in a multilingual family, thanks to his Mexican father and English mother. But for him two of the most important languages are the language of listening and the language of seeing. In this poem, the language of seeing conveys a precise message more clearly and sensitively than the same message could be communicated in a paragraph of prose.

Teodoro Luna's Two Kisses

Mr. Teodoro Luna in his later years had taken to kissing

His wife

Not so much with his lips as with his brows.
This is not to say he put his forehead
Against her mouth—
Rather, he would lift his eyebrows, once, quickly:
Not so vigorously he might be confused with the villain
Famous in the theaters, but not so little as to be thought
A slight movement, one of accident. This way
He kissed her
Often and quietly, across tables and through doorways,
Sometimes in photographs, and so through the years themselves.
This was his passion, that only she might see. The chance
He might feel some movement on her lips
Toward laughter.

(Buckley, 115-116)

The arts and aesthetic perception are rarely integrated with other subjects, such as business or science. Marcia Muldeur Eaton, a philosopher at the University of Minnesota who often focuses on the benefits of aesthetic perception, recognizes that this sense of separation has often been sought by artists in an effort to create a distinctive niche for the aesthetic. But this attempt at purity has led to an artificial separation (Eaton, 55-56). Self-imposed separation has contributed to the way many see the arts—as a thing apart from everyday reality. But the opposite is true. We watch TV from sofas and chairs that are aesthetically designed, listen to music while shopping, read dinner selections from cleverly written and designed menus. The arts surround us, but often the quality is low and most people don't take the time to direct their full attention to what is unique and mind-expanding, so the effect of the arts is negligible.

Why Does an Aesthetic Perspective Improve Leadership Skills?

Changing your perspective, seeing things anew, is recognized as essential to innovation. The necessity of reframing your thoughts is a belief widely held by individuals from different disciplines.

A Fresh Perspective

As in many of the Babson and Unilever examples, scientists often cite empathy, which allows them to see from a different perspective, as enhancing their skills. “‘I believe that the writing of poems makes me a better medical practitioner,’ says physician-poet Jack Coulehan. ‘Poetry demands a style of seeing and responding that enhances my ability to form therapeutic bonds with patients.’” Empathy is often used by physical scientists, too. “Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar made many of his discoveries in astrophysics by imagining the universe ‘from the point of view of the star,’ and Richard Feynman revolutionized quantum physics by asking himself questions such as ‘If I were an electron, what would I do?’ Hannes Alfvén, another astrophysicist, has written that many of his insights have come from imagining what it is like to be a charged particle (Root-Bernstein, pp. 46-47, 196).

When speaking of perspective change, others emphasize the necessity of breaking away from the familiar. Choreographer William Forsythe says, “You have to leave tradition to be able to see something lasting from a somewhat different viewpoint. Innovation implies nothing more than a letting go of a specific standpoint” (Wessemann, 46). Neural scientist Terrence Deacon explains, “Success or failure at learning and problem solving depends on habits of attention, what we find salient and what we don’t tend to notice, and how easily one can override and reprogram these tendencies. There are also internal distractions, in particular those that arise

from past learning experiences. . . [If] the feedback about incorrect responses is weak, forgetting the old in order to learn the new can become a practical impossibility” (Deacon, 48-49). From leading consultant George Stalk and colleagues, the idea becomes, “Growth strategies built around the idea of breaking compromises are neither new nor limited to a few particular industries. But to visualize such a strategy requires a company’s managers to clear their heads of conventional thinking that pervades their industry” (Stalk, 136).

Temporarily putting aside the way things have previously been done is difficult. What we read into the comments above is that people need a spur to help them see things anew.

Individuals need to open themselves to possibility, relearn how to absorb, discover, and solve problems in ways that were second nature when they were children. The majority of Unilever and Babson stories are examples of perception changed through a heightened aesthetic sensibility. Normal business processes, unfortunately, tend to push people into the tried and true and often stale ways of thinking and acting. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, originator of the popular theory of “flow,” teamed with Keith Sawyer to explain the situations under which “problemsolving insights are *unlikely* to occur: . . . At every stage of the process, the stimulation and feedback of peers is necessary to select and evaluate potential insights. . . . A schedule in which a person is always busy, goal-directed, involved in conscious, rational problem solving” (Csikszentmihalyi & Sawyer, 359). In many team-oriented, results-driven businesses, these inhibiting characteristics are typical of normal processes.

LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) provides an example of a positive process.

When trying to find a way to engage businesspeople, one of the organization’s advisers, social philosopher and management consultant Charles Handy, suggested inviting them to specific events and to follow the event with discussion about the experience, with the artists participating. That idea has become the LIFT Business Arts Forum. Julia Rowntree, the

forum's director, says it "encourages an ability to flourish in ambiguous situations and a willingness to listen in greater depth to a minority view or unfamiliar perspective. It encourages people to realize that they can't control everything, and not only to think with their minds, but to use all their senses and to trust their instincts." Recently, the forum has expanded into a civic dialogue bringing together the worlds of business, the arts, public policy, and education, a living example of the benefits of fertilizing ideas through the interaction of people from different disciplines (Rowntree, 77-78 and personal conversation).

Overreliance on logic and technology encourages a binary, linear outlook, encouraging us to see the world in black and white. Howard Gardner explains how this tendency affects students. "In social studies and the humanities, the enemies of understanding are scripts and stereotypes. Students readily believe that events occur in typical ways, and they invoke these scripts even inappropriately. For example, they regard struggles between two parties in a dispute as a 'good guy versus bad guy' movie script" (Gardner, 163).

Emotional Intelligence

The arts elicit emotional responses. Exposure to a wide range of arts should help develop an individual's ability to recognize, feel, and respond to various emotions. In 1995, Daniel Goleman synthesized a range of behavioral research to produce *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. It became a widely read book. Yet nine years later emotions seem to be little more important to most senior executives than when the book was written. Like many business fads, it seems to have had its moment in the sun. But, as Goleman makes clear, this is not a fad; it is a scientific fact. Goleman made a strong case against emotional illiteracy, and many others have developed similar arguments in different ways.

The “value of the emotions,” like “changing perspective,” is a topic investigated in many academic and practitioner fields because of its wide applicability. Two scholars often cited by proponents of the arts are Antonio Damasio and Ellen Dissanayake. Neural scientist Damasio, in his celebrated book *Descartes’ Error*, tells us, “There appears to be a collection of systems in the human brain consistently dedicated to the goal-oriented process we call reasoning, and to the response selection we call decision making, with a special emphasis on the personal and social domain. This same collection of systems is also involved in emotion and feeling, and is partly dedicated to processing body signals. . . . It does not seem sensible to leave emotions and feelings out of any overall concept of mind. . . . [Feelings] come first in development and retain a primacy that subtly pervades our mental life. . . . since what comes first constitutes a frame of reference for what comes after, feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense” (Damasio, 158-160).

Ethologist Ellen Dissanayake, whose multidisciplinary research delves into evolution and human behavior, sees human expression through the arts as an innate part of what makes us human. She explains how all primitive cultures find it important to make something special, whether by music, dance, poetry, color, or some other means. She finds experiments indicating that “rich cognition can exist without language (and language does not presuppose rich cognition)” add weight to her belief that “images, patterns, music, emotional intonation, and emotion in general are as much a part of human experience and knowledge as language” (Dissanayake, 154).

Letting the Emotions Flow (in a Controlled Situation)

Unfortunately, too few business leaders know how to encourage, or even allow, constructive emotional reactions. But some leaders are skilled in encouraging both emotions and logic. “In most corporate settings, it’s taboo to talk about emotional needs; a strong will is often

mistaken for mental toughness,” says Jeanie Duck, a consultant with expertise in the human side of major change efforts, in her book *The Change Monster*.

Duck talks of one team that succeeded, partially because it allowed the expression of emotions, and it made sure the emotions were balanced. With schedules slipping and irritation growing, a project manager instituted biweekly meetings. “At the first meeting, he said, ‘We’re going to start every meeting with a fifteen minute gripe session. Anyone can complain about a problem or disappointment. We can visit Pity City during these sessions, but we’re not going to relocate!’ One participant said, ‘This is the time we all get to say ‘Ain’t it awful’ and ‘Poor baby’ to each other. . . . Twice a week, they visited Pity City, but only for the allotted fifteen minutes. The next part of each meeting was a fifteen-minute brag session; people swapped stories about small victories, problems resolved, and appreciative customers. The remaining time was spent on problem solving and determining what to do next.” Camaraderie and confidence grew throughout the ten-month project (Duck, 236, 157).

Philosopher and Renaissance woman Martha Nussbaum taught a course in law and literature at the University of Chicago to rectify what she calls “. . . a defect in human beings . . . who cultivate their human sympathies unequally and narrowly. The remedy for that defect seems to be not the repudiation of fancy, but its more consistent and humane cultivation; not the substitution of impersonal institutional structures for the imagination, but the construction of institutions, and institutional actors, who more perfectly embody, and by institutional firmness protect, the insights of the compassionate imagination.” This “defect” is common among lawyers. Nussbaum’s course intended to offer an “investigation and principled defense of a humanistic and multivalued conception of public rationality that is powerfully exemplified in the common-law tradition. This conception needs defending, since it has for some time been under attack from the more ‘scientific’ conceptions offered by the law-and-economics

movement” (Nussbaum ’95, xviii, xv). We agree. Our institutions should “embody and . . . protect the insights of the compassionate imagination.” Lever-Fabergé, Unilever Ice Cream & Frozen Foods, and Babson College are working to develop and sustain that compassionate imagination.

Developing a Harmony of the Senses

Elizabeth Cox is a novelist and a college teacher of creative writing. Through both of her professions, she recognizes the benefits of imposing ideas from a new field onto familiar material, of having all the senses working harmoniously. To create the best mental state for writing, she cultivates sensibilities that she believes will complement, though not match, the content of her planned book.

When writing her first novel, *Familiar Ground*, she immersed herself in symphonies and sonatas. Classical music was not the subject of her novel; she just knew that she wanted some aspect of her novel to be inspired by the flow of music. For example, she might listen to Beethoven or Dvorák, then go for a walk. She would suddenly recognize how the music at one point had suddenly changed and gone in a new direction before coming back again. She recognized that her writing needed that same sense of flowing departure and return.

For seventeen years Cox taught creative writing at Duke, often to future engineers; now she teaches creative writing at MIT. She has to tell her technically trained students to “Stop THINKING!” She works to make them aware of the power of images. Gradually, she begins to see changes in the students, which show “on faces and in gestures first.” She has to stop her students from coming up with plots and then “pushing their characters into molds.” At the outset, it’s an incredible stretch for the students when she tells them to let their characters have their own lives.

How Can an Aesthetic Perspective Be Measured?

Most “proof” that enhancing an aesthetics perspective improves decision making is still anecdotal. The evidence lies in stories and the results in behavior and in performance appraisals. Scientific studies investigating transfer of learning are inconclusive. Even major reviews of the transfer studies conducted by people sympathetic to the arts wind up with inconclusive results, as in the REAP report. Harvard’s Project Zero conducted REAP, Reviewing Education and the Arts Project. Its final report, *The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows* (2000), was a three-year review of 188 arts education studies spanning 50 years (Winner). It found three areas with demonstrable causal links (such as between listening to music and spatial-temporal reasoning) and seven other areas with no reliable link (such as between an arts -rich education and creative thinking). The studies included used only quantitative research. The reason for inconclusive transfer studies may well lie in the way transfer is defined and in the methodology being used.

John Bransford and Daniel Schwartz, professors at the University of Washington and Stanford, both formerly at Vanderbilt, explain. “Our thesis is that evidence for transfer is often difficult to find because we tend to think about it from a perspective that blinds us to its presence. . . . [we use] too blunt an instrument for studying the smaller changes in learning that lead to the development of expertise.”

Transfer experiments generally measure the direct transfer of specific information from one field to a related field. The goal is to increase expertise in the related field. Such a goal must be sufficiently narrow to permit reasonably accurate measurement in a limited time frame.

Even though that is what transfer experiments generally measure, that is not what knowledge (Re) Educating for Leadership September, 2004

transfer from the arts is intended to accomplish. Gradually improving ability in generic problem-solving, for example, is not an easily measurable goal.

Bransford and Schwartz call the correct approach to transfer “preparation for future learning (PFL).” In PFL, “the focus shifts to whether they are prepared to learn to solve new problems. . . . Overall, one of the important lessons of the PFL perspective is that it moves ‘affective’ and social concepts like ‘tolerance for ambiguity,’ courage spans, persistence in the face of difficulty, willingness to learn from others, and ‘sensitivity to the expectations of others’ from the periphery towards the center of cognitive theories of learning. . . . An especially significant benefit of the PFL perspective is that it may help us understand how to maximize the value of a variety of experiences (e.g., studying the humanities; participating in art, music, and sports; living in a different culture) that seem important intuitively but are difficult to assess from a DA [Direct Application] point of view.” The real skill that needs to be developed, they say, is “adaptive expertise.”

Bransford and Schwartz believe that tests can be devised to measure PFL, but that they are more complex and require studies to be conducted over longer periods of time. Reuven Tsur, a professor of Hebrew literature who heads a Cognitive Poetics project at Tel Aviv University, says, about his own aesthetic theories and about “empirical research in aesthetics in general: if you want to stick to the most rigorous experimental procedures, you must confine yourself to fairly trivial issues. If you want to explore fairly significant issues in aesthetics, you must relax to some degree or other the rigour demanded by cognitive psychologists” (Bradburn). But it is not a relaxing of standards that is needed; it is application of new standards of assessment and evaluation.

Another scholar who has written about the difficulties of transferring knowledge from the arts to other fields is David Perkins of Harvard's Project Zero. After explaining in a 1994 paper published by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts how viewing visual arts can improve your thinking, he discusses what must be done to facilitate that transfer. Where Bransford and Schwartz argue that the wrong thing is being measured, Perkins believes there's been little scientific verification of transfer because evaluators do not apply the right conditions for transfer. The two essential conditions are (1) "abundant and diverse practice," and (2) "reflective awareness of principles and deliberate mindful connection making." (Perkins, 87)

Like Bransford and Schwartz, he sees repetition over time as essential to successful transfer. At Unilever, exposure to arts-related experiences over time is crucial to the expected result. At Babson and Unilever, what is learned through the arts must then be consciously applied in daily work. This is Perkins's "deliberate mindful connection making," and it does not come naturally.

Terrence Deacon explains, "The process of learning the new symbolic association is a restructuring event, in which the previously learned associations are suddenly seen in a new light and must be reorganized with respect to one another. This reorganization requires mental effort to suppress one set of associative responses in favor of another derived from them. . . . What we might call a symbolic insight takes place the moment we let go of one associative strategy and grab hold of another higher-order one to guide our memory searches" (Deacon, 93). Engagement with the arts can enhance aesthetic sensibilities, but you still must consciously open yourself to new ways of evaluating situations.

Sometimes it may be difficult to discern a habit acquired through repetition from a conscious effort to make new connections or arrive at symbolic insights. A recent Yale Medical School

study especially applied Perkins' first condition: abundant and diverse practice. A selected group of students was given an art appreciation course in representational art. After the course, the students scored noticeably better in analyzing patient symptoms than did the test group that did not take the course. In their evaluation of the art works, they needed to take into account the whole image and avoid jumping to any conclusions. When they returned to patient evaluations, they were less likely to jump to the most obvious symptom and more likely to sense the more subtle clues to symptoms (Dolev).

Stanford's Elliott Eisner, one of the most respected educators studying the arts, also understands the problems inherent in evaluation. He recognizes that the process is often what's most important, and that whereas "Most perceptual activities are essentially efforts to recognize rather than to explore the particular expressive qualities of a form. . . . Teaching in the arts is very much concerned with helping students learn how to see the interactions among the qualities constituting the whole." Simple knowledge of the process is not what's most important, nor is the ability to demonstrate competence in using the process on a test. "The context that really matters educationally is the life context outside school." The encouragement for future use, or the conscious "preparation for future learning," as Bransford and Schwartz would say, is given when the instructor subtly provides "not only permission but also encouragement to use one's imagination as a source of content" (Eisner, 76, 187, 82). More study is needed before we have a way to know whether that encouragement is likely to be applied outside the learning situation in the future.

What's Needed for a Successful Arts-Related Program?

In one of the major books that discusses the various justifications for art education, Levi and Smith summarize that "we can justify the teaching of art on the basis of art's power to

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stimulate the imagination and expand perception, promote the integration of the human person, develop aesthetic intelligence, realize aesthetic value, and provide humanistic understanding (Levi, p. 155). If you believe this training can be beneficial to adults as well as children, how do you begin the conversation about an arts-related program with executives and administrators, with colleagues, with employees and students? It must be understood that an arts program with a goal of enhancing the group culture and individual leadership qualities is not separate from strategy. The questions that need to be asked—about values, aspirations, and internal, external, and competitive perceptions of the company or college—are the same ones asked during strategic planning. Therefore, every effort should be made to raise the issue of the arts when strategy is being discussed. Avoid allowing the topic to be pushed into a secondary position.

How suitable is your business or university for a full-scale arts program? Many businesses and business schools are not appropriate for an arts-related program that enhances aesthetic perception. For example, Babson, by its academic emphases, attracts a slightly different faculty and student body from most business schools because it has a greater infusion of liberal arts and places greater emphasis on entrepreneurial ability. There are a few simplistic, seemingly obvious, prescripts. Those most senior in the organization must recognize the continual need for expanded perception and value creativity and innovation highly. They must be open-minded and place high importance on the quality of people in the organization. If this does not describe your senior executives or administrators, don't begin an arts-related program.

Programs like those at Unilever and Babson should succeed on both personal and cultural levels. In fact, it may not be possible to succeed on one level and not the other. Participants at Unilever regularly speak of how their participation makes them more passionate about their

jobs, their company, and even their lives in general. In both programs, participants and observers talk about how a lunchtime session after a difficult morning will send them back to their desks or computers with a fresh, alert outlook. This view was especially heard from participants following an Ice Cream & Frozen Foods noontime salsa dance class.

Part of the resistance to an arts program stems from fear of the unknown and fear of the different. But as Babson's Bill Lawler says, "We want students to reach outside their areas of comfort." Addressing and overcoming such fears is a purpose of such programs. In part, that's why Babson assigns students to an arts group rather than allowing them to choose, and why the two programs described here have included unique activities as juggling, puppetry, and standup comedy.

Guidelines Worth Following

There's no checklist for getting started. Everyone's needs are different and prevailing attitudes are different; the position within the organization of the person proposing an arts program will make a difference. But there are guidelines you can follow to prepare yourself.

Observation of the Unilever and Babson programs shows six qualities they share. All appear to be essential to the success of a major arts program in business, Their relative importance will vary, and further observation of other successful programs may yield additional components.

- Start from business issues – Remember, this is *not* sponsorship of external performances.

Both programs aim to improve the quality of thinking and the skills that will lead to success in business, not to teach anyone to be an artist. All supervisors and participating artists must understand this. The arts serve as a neutral ground for consideration of business issues. The arts disorient participants from their typical perspectives and allow them to see through different lenses (to use a popular business cliché). Some readers may ask, “Where do arts-related programs stop and business begin?” If done well, the programs will soon be seen as a natural avenue to better understanding of business issues; there should not be a clear dividing line. When expansiveness and depth of thinking are improved, better business decision making should follow.

Although there have not been enough instances of true integration for us to state it definitively that maximum benefits should come from involving artists in the day-to-day activity of the business, we believe that is true. Hit-and-run workshops can be momentarily inspiring but are unlikely to cause significant change.

- Aim high – Don’t be timid.

Be clear about your purpose. The program is closely linked to organizational strategy.

Recognize the unique attributes that the arts bring or talk to someone who can articulate that unique contribution for you. Read what artists write about their processes; read in the growing field of organizational aesthetics; talk with experienced arts administrators. To help set your purpose, determine the current gaps in your training programs and in your development of people. Prepare questions and raise issues that represent your needs and your limitations. Even with a clear purpose, remain open to new possibilities and to surprising outcomes.

- Assure active participation from the organization's leaders – A supportive memo is not enough.

This is part of every “change” recommendation, but, because so much change is implemented without *active*, *visible* leadership from the top, it cannot be overemphasized. Before they offer visible support, executives, administrators, and faculty must recognize the need to see situations from multiple perspectives and be open to trying new ways to gain those perspectives.

- Offer experiences in multiple arts – They will complement each other.

If a program is to appeal to many people, the offerings should have considerable variety. But it's also true that different arts or different aspects of the same art will require different types of aesthetic and cognitive responses. It all combines to allow a fuller response to the complexity of today's business problems. Arts-based training involving actors (role playing, simulation) are often used in business, but greater strides can be made by tapping the other arts in unexpected ways.

- Speak the languages of business and arts – And understand the different attitudes, too.

The leader(s) of an arts-in-business program must speak both the language of business and the language of arts. Institutional history must be understood, as well as how values have shifted over time. Sensitivity to the expectations of business and of the creative industries is essential.

Artists who work in the program should also be “bilingual” in these ways. Here, the process is more important than the product. Choreographer Twyla Tharp recognizes that the differing

goals of art and business cause artists and businesspeople to often act differently in relation to creativity and innovation. “With profits, paychecks, and promotions at stake, it’s only natural to try to reduce the risk by relying on what’s already worked. . . . That’s legitimate connective thinking in business” (Tharp, p. 105). As a result, business has much copycatting and relatively little radical change. Incremental creative gains are easier to conceive and achieve, as well as less risky. Artists must recognize this basic conservative trend, yet simultaneously know that the larger, riskier innovations often yield the biggest profits.

Assure that the artists will be treated like any other division of the business or the college.

Don’t be patronizing or shortchange the artists. Recognize the unique value they bring to the project. Determine how to assure that their knowledge and processes are valued. Then, regardless of all your preparation and precautions, be prepared for culture clashes. Anticipate. Where and why are disputes likely to occur? How will you respond?

- Exemplify seriousness and commitment – It must come from the organization’s DNA; lip service won’t cut it.

From the outset, organization and program leaders must agree on the seriousness of the business purpose and see the program as a necessary part of the environment. This can be demonstrated by the prominence of the program, its presence in the company or on campus, and the way it is funded.

Remember that experiential learning comes through achievements. Design an arts program not as a series of one-day wonders but as a vital part of continuous learning for your company or college. When implemented properly, the arts can instill in today’s and tomorrow’s

business leaders more emotion, understanding of layers of meaning, tolerance for ambiguity, willingness to take risks, and, overall, better communication..

Encouraging Signs

As of fall, 2004, much encouraging activity is taking place in the emerging field of arts-in-business. A young professional society called ACORN, which stands for Aesthetics, Creativity, and Organization Research Network, is rapidly building its membership and is successfully presenting programs at the annual Academy of Management conferences. The Arts & Business Council in the United States is starting a program called the Creativity Connection to educate businesses about the relevance of arts-based training (both major behavioral change and skill-building), consult with individual businesses about their particular needs and which ones might be filled by arts-based training, and then act as agent, matching the right arts organization or individuals with the business. Arts & Business in the United Kingdom and Learning Lab Denmark in Copenhagen continue to explore, through innovative, practical initiatives, the best ways for the arts and business to work together.

New books are appearing that offer important source material for both theorists and practitioners. Pierre Guillet de Monthoux's *The Art Firm* offers, among its many treasures, a compact history of aesthetics as it applies to the field of management. Lotte Darsø's *Artful Creation* summarizes interviews with 53 innovators in the field of arts-in-business and presents a framework for thinking about and being active in this new area.

We'll close with words from Maxine Greene that also reflect our beliefs about aesthetic education for all individuals. "To engage with works of art is to go in search of fresh connections, unsuspected meanings, to engage in acts of continuing discovery. The more informed these are, the more sensitive we are likely to be to the complexity of the world and

the suggestiveness of it, to color and texture and qualities of sound and the relations of shapes in space, to untapped possibilities” (Greene, 42).

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