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Editor's note

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For about 20 combined years, a large part of our professional energies and personal passions have been engaged by the use of artistic skills, processes and experiences as learning tools: in complex global corporations, small and medium-sized businesses, professional associations, universities, historical and cultural centers, government agencies, leadership academies, and non-profit organizations.

In 2005, we edited a special issue of this journal (Vol. 26 No. 5) in which we documented the emergence of arts-based learning for business as a field of practice and traced this trend to the confluence of two explosive forces in the 1990s – the increasingly rapid rate of change in the business environment, which often outstripped the capacity of traditionally-managed organizations to adapt effectively; and an exponential increase in the complexity and social interconnectivity of the global marketplace. The result was a demand for new organizational models and learning tools to help knowledge workers better cope with radical unpredictability, adapt to change, surface creativity, and innovate. We also cited specific examples of companies using arts-based applied skills training in areas such as teambuilding, executive presence, and intercultural communications; and reported on the growing awareness among senior business leaders of the benefits to their companies from these new forms of arts-business partnerships.

At that time, because creativity and innovation were becoming business concerns of paramount importance, arts-based learning was increasingly the subject of worldwide attention, a large and growing bibliography, and even television documentaries. To offer just two examples of the growing interest: in 2004 *Harvard Business Review* cited Dan

Pink's idea that *The MFA is the New MBA* as one of its breakthrough ideas of the year while in Japan, at roughly the same time, NHK identified arts-based learning in business as one of the ten most important emergent trends of the twenty-first century.

In the past five years, as business success has become ever more closely linked to the development of creatively intelligent companies and leaders, the field of arts-based learning has continued to evolve dynamically, experiencing four major trends. The first three, which inform much of the writing contained in this new special issue, are extraordinarily promising. The fourth presents a serious challenge to those of us who champion the practical use of artistic skills, processes, and experiences in business. We will come back to that trend – and how we may begin to work together to reverse it – in our closing paragraphs.

The first and most striking of the trends we have observed has been an accelerated growth of interest in our field, to a point that today arts-based learning in the workplace is no longer a little known or fringe phenomenon. Indeed, it has been experienced by hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of people, and incorporated into organizational development programs at a majority of the *Fortune* 500. Arts-based approaches have also been integrated into the curricula of many of the world's most prestigious business schools, and arts-based tools are being used in employee training programs by a growing number of local, regional, and national governments in North America and Europe.

A current global overview is offered in Nick Nissley's article, "Arts-based learning at work," in which he surveys leaders in business, training, and academia about the relevance of arts-based learning and weaves the responses into a clarion statement supporting arts-based learning's role in strategy, creativity, and leadership. This issue also offers examples of how arts-based learning has been applied successfully in leading companies and organizations, including InterContinental Hotels, GlaxoSmithKline, Target, IKEA, Samsung, Bang & Olufsen, IBM, Kepner Tregoe, LexisNexis, Harcourt Assessment, and Polaroid.

The second trend has been the dramatically increased awareness of business leaders, policy makers, and educators of the potential of the arts to foster urgently needed creativity skills. In the USA, this trend has been fueled by a growing consensus that the American educational system, from pre-school through lifelong learning, inadequately develops the "creative intelligence" that is required to maintain a competitive twenty-first century workforce. For example, a 2006 study by the Conference Board showed that while a large majority of the 400 senior US business leaders surveyed considered the ability to think creatively, work collaboratively, and communicate effectively (especially across cultures) to be of the highest importance, more than 80 percent reported that they found these skills only developed to a mediocre level (at best) in the college graduates applying for jobs in their companies (Casner-Lotto and Barrington, 2006). A follow-up study two years later underlined the business need for the kinds of creativity skills that can be fostered by arts-based learning, with business leaders placing an especially high value on problem identification – the quintessential artistic skill that forms the point of

departure for virtually every artistic process and product (Lichtenberg *et al.*, 2008). Not surprisingly, major companies all over the world are integrating arts-based learning into their innovation processes – most commonly at the “front end” through arts-based ideation processes, but with increasing frequency throughout the new-product development cycle as well.

The articles “Not just a pretty face: economic drivers behind the arts-in-business movement” by Robert D. Austin and Lee Devin and “In front of the blank canvas: sensing emerging futures” by Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer present detailed examinations of the need for creativity and innovation and ways to fulfill that need. Three of the articles that focus on applications of arts-based learning to foster creative intelligence, in various forms, are “If InterContinental were a sound ... what would it be?” by Michael Spencer, “Pointing your way to success through metaphorming” by Todd Siler, and “What good are artists?” by John Reaves and David Green.

The third trend, which flows directly from the recent studies, is a greatly increased focus on using artistic skills, processes, and experiences to help redefine the relationship between individuals and organizations, from the development of leadership to the shaping of organizational culture. Most recently, 2008-2009 Towers Perrin (now Towers Watson) studies on the topic of workforce engagement suggest the potential of the arts to help companies’ employees achieve self-actualization (to use Maslow’s term) through their work (Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study, 2007-2008). Although this trend is still in a very early stage, the potential implications are truly far-reaching.

Nancy J. Adler’s “Going beyond the dehydrated language of management: leadership insight,” Suzanne Merritt’s “What does beauty have to do with business?” Graeme Thomson’s “The art and science of experiential leadership,” and Anu M. Mitra, Yen Hsieh, and Ted Buswick’s “Learning how to look: developing leadership through intentional observation” all explain how arts-based learning can lead to growth in leadership skills.

The fourth and most recent trend is far less encouraging. Over the past 18 months, in the wake of the global financial crisis, it has become far more difficult to forge new learning-based arts-business partnerships, launch new arts-based learning projects in corporations, or even complete existing programs. Short-term pressures become most acute when corporations feel most threatened, which is precisely what the financial crisis has done. The unfortunate, if predictable, result is that at just the moment when companies most urgently need to strengthen their creative capacities, many are cutting back on their use of arts-based learning. By doing so, they can (very modestly and very briefly) improve their quarterly numbers; training and development expenses visibly decline, while the resulting costs (lost productivity, opportunity, innovation and engagement) don’t show up in identifiable terms on any corporate balance sheet.

At the same time, after a decade of growth, the resources available to promote arts-based learning and facilitate its interdisciplinary partnerships have become far scarcer. Between 1999 and 2008, two organizational champions (Arts & Business in the UK, through its

Creative Development Program; and Americans for the Arts in the USA, through Creativity Connection, which Harvey Seifter founded in 2003 as a program of the Arts & Business Council, and directed through 2008) invested somewhere in the vicinity of \$5 million in fostering arts-based learning, not a vast amount, of course, but in a nascent field, enough to have a considerable impact, and in the cash-starved world of the non-profit arts, a significant sum indeed.

Aware of the rapid commercial success that arts organizations such as Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Chicago's Second City had experienced with their pioneering work in this field, both Arts & Business UK and Americans for the Arts hoped that arts-based learning could be developed relatively quickly into revenues that could underwrite other programs that they saw as more integral to their respective missions. Over the years, both organizations experimented with a variety of service models (agency, fee-for-service, packager/distributor, etc.), but none proved able to generate the short term ROI that was desired. Selling cycles proved to be too long and complex, delivery was too customized and labor intensive, and the financial pressures motivating both the service organizations and the artist practitioners led to unrealistic pricing strategies, which proved unsustainable during economic downturns. Once these facts became clear, both organizations – themselves under pressure from the financial crisis – pulled back from their leadership roles and substantially reduced their commitments to this field.

Our own experiences – and the corporate experiences documented in this special issue – clearly demonstrate the powerful benefits that can grow out the practical use of artistic skills, processes, and experiences in business. However, we are forced to recognize that many of those benefits are complex, subtle, and long term in nature, while both businesses and arts organizations too often make their investment choices based primarily on short-term considerations.

If we agree that championing is required for the practice of arts-based learning in business to flourish, where will it come from? If you see creative intelligence as the great differentiator of the near future, as we do, a great deal rides on this question.

We have no simple answer to propose, but we do have some thoughts about how to frame the problem. We believe that a fresh supporting architecture is needed, or rather – because architecture implies stasis – we need to answer this question: what kinds of systems will support and sustain the development and integration of arts-based learning into society's most complex institutions and intractable problems? What elements are needed? An initial (and certainly partial) list might include:

1. Business leaders investing in new ways of integrating organizational development, corporate social responsibility, and corporate innovation functions.
2. Academic and other non-governmental non-profit organizations:
 - o convening and supporting high-level, sustained, interdisciplinary dialogue about creating ongoing support to promote arts-based learning; and

- conducting research into building creative intelligence through the application of arts-based learning.
3. Funders creating opportunities to apply arts-based learning in a range of community problems, especially by supporting the use of arts-based tools as learning resources for its non-arts grantees.

We urge our readers to contact us with their reactions to this issue, as well as with their ideas and suggestions for practical and effective responses to the challenges before us, as we strive to strengthen our field in the coming years.

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