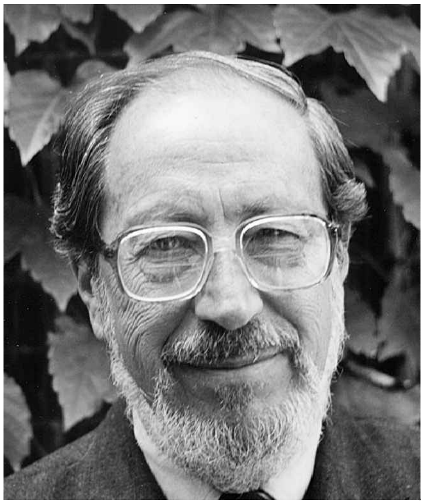
From the Founding Editor

EDITORIAL



It is with great sadness that I have to report the loss of another colleague, Don Michael. Don died at age 75 of complications from pancreatic cancer that was diagnosed two years ago, but with the help of some new treatments, Don was able to continue his full and rich life for those two years. Don died with the same grace that he lived, quietly going while listening to Mozart. We were fortunate in *Reflections* to be able to bring some of Don's great insights to all our readers. He thought deeply about things and was, in a sense, a wonderful conscience for all of us in that he never would shrink from the reality that he saw. He reminded us persistently and with intensity of the power of the unconscious within us and the hidden forces around us that make learning such a complex and difficult process. We can honor Don best by taking seriously what he saw and what he tried to get us to see.

In this issue, we turn explicitly to the problem of seeing. By focusing on the role of the arts, the aesthetic dimension in society, and the impact of artists on our own life, we hope to broaden our readers' vision. To enhance this purpose, we include in this issue a photo essay by our own team member Emily Sper, who has shown us with her photos how much our eye can deceive or enhance.

We believe that the world of business in particular has ignored the role of the aesthetic to its own detriment. The importance of the arts in relation to other societal concerns was first pointed out to us by our editorial board at our first seminal meeting in Chicago in 1999. We are especially grateful to John Seely Brown and John Kao for stimulating our thinking in this area. Subsequently, Ray Stata made a significant comment in one of our executive education seminars that bears so pointedly on the role of the performance arts and improvisation. He said that one thing he had learned as an executive is that "Everything happens through conversation." What we see and how we choose to talk about it is thus critical to everything we do.

As a consequence, we have launched a serious exploration of this topic. In this and subsequent issues, we hope to expose ourselves and our readers to what the arts have to offer us and, in that process, to expand our own vision and our own capacity to respond more richly to the complexity that surrounds us. I have my own view of what artists and the arts can do for us and have put those into my essay at the close of this issue.

E. H. Schein

Ed Schein

EDITORIAL

In This Issue

Edgar H. Schein and Karen Ayas

We have tried to give the reader a variety of viewpoints on the role of the arts and artists in society and business. We start with a photo essay by Emily Sper illustrating the beauty we fail to see in our everyday lives. Next is an interview with John Kao whose life itself is a work of art. As the reader will discover, in his current seventh career, John is creating environments for practitioners that will enable them to utilize their creative potential fully as they solve business problems.

The artistry of business processes is exemplified in the description by Philip Mirvis, Karen Ayas, and George Roth of a mundane process of business transformation reaching truly creative heights when a group of executives and consultants put their minds to it. A learning "performance" in the desert of Jordan marks the leadership passage, and we hear from Tex Gunning, departing company chairman, about the artistry of leading change. Bill Torbert, a true master of "performativity," sums up with his learnings and questions.

Next, Robert Fritz reminds us that the creativity is not just in the performance and the improvisation that it affords, but in the composition of the score itself. The thought that practitioners are really "composers" bears serious reflection. What managers can learn from jazz and the roles of improvisation and creativity in entrepreneurship is further explored in a two-part article by Stephen Buckley in which he has interviewed an executive, a researcher, and a consultant.

Much has been said about the role of improvisation, especially in music, so next is a thoughtful piece by Alf Westelius, an academic and musician. Drawing from classical music, he illustrates the way in which musicians combine the discipline of playing with the score, listening to one another, and maintaining that delicate balance between learning and performing. Karl Weick comments from an academic stand, and Noam Cook, a flute player who has also studied how flutes are made, comments as well.

Drawing from theater, Dvora Yanow explores improvisation from the viewpoint of what it takes to be effective and how it can and should be used more in the process of teaching. Michael Jones, a pianist and composer, shares his own experience of being a successful performer.

We then shift to how practitioners working with artists have transformed some of society's institutions. Jean Horstman and Julia Rowntree describe the transformation of life in a moribund London hostel after an arts program was introduced. Rowntree also tells of her experience at the Business Arts Forum, a series of seminars and performances at the London International Festival of Theatre, which created a new dialogue between arts and business.

Next we offer an original contribution from Nancy Adler, an enthusiastic commentator from our Spring issue, and Lew Yung-Chien. We close with a brief essay by Ed Schein on the role of art and the artist that illustrates the range and depth of the arts' impact on society.

Contributors

Nancy J. Adler is a professor of management, McGill University, currently an artist in residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts.

Tamar Arnon is a photographer and Curator of the Arts Programme at Aldgate Hostel and of One Mile East.

Karen Ayas is associate editor, *Reflections;* research fellow, Erasmus University, Rotterdam; and partner, The Ripples Group.

Stephen C. Buckley is an entrepreneur, writer, and independent consultant in Somerville, MA.

S.D. Noam Cook is associate professor of philosophy at San Jose State University, a consulting researcher at Xerox PARC, and a member of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus.

Nils Fonstad is a doctoral candidate at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

Robert Fritz codesigned (with Peter Senge and Charles Kiefer) the original "Leadership and Mastery" course on which *The Fifth Discipline* is partly based. He is a consultant, composer, filmmaker, and author.

J. Jean Horstman is a member and former managing director, Society for Organizational Learning. Prior, she worked internationally in the arts.

Bill Hughes is a managing partner at Cambridge Incubator.

Michael Jones is a pianist, composer, and author of *Creating an Imaginative Life*. He integrates his music and personal narrative in talks and seminars exploring the synergy between work, art, and creativity. < www.pianoscapes.com >

John Kao is founder and CEO of The Idea Factory, film producer, and author of *Jamming: The Art and Discipline of Business Creativity.*

Lew Yung-Chien conducts workshops on Tai Chi and leadership for executives and managers.

Philip H. Mirvis is an organizational psychologist whose work concerns large-scale change and the character of the workforce and workplace.

Felix Reyes-Nunez is a participant in the Serpentine Gallery photography project at Look Ahead's Bayswater Hostel.

Arthur Roberts is a consultant to individuals, groups, and organizations.

George L. Roth researches learning across organizational boundaries. His current focus involves knowledge supply chains and knowledge partnerships.

Julia Rowntree is director and originator of the London International Festival of Theatre's Business Arts Forum.

C. Otto Scharmer is a visiting lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management and the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and faculty member of the Fujitsu Global Knowledge Institute.

Edgar H. Schein is Sloan Fellows professor of management emeritus and senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Emily Sper is a photographer, graphic designer, and author-illustrator in Boston, MA. Her photographs have been exhibited in the United States and abroad. < www.sperphoto.com >

Bill Torbert is professor of organization studies at Boston College, partner of HarthillUSA, and director of Trillium Asset Management.

Karl E. Weick is the Rensis Likert Collegiate Professor of Organizational Behavior and Psychology, School of Business Administration, University of Michigan.

Alf Westelius is a professor at Linköping University and associate researcher at the Stockholm School of Economics.

Dvora Yanow is professor and chair, Department of Public Administration, California State University, Hayward.

Beyond the Surface

FEATURE

Emily Sper

When I look around, I see colors and patterns. I'll stop to gaze at light reflecting off a window. Or it might be crows silhouetted against an evening sky. Sometimes bizarre juxtapositions make me laugh out loud.

Ordinary objects take on a new dimension when you take the time to really look around. For me, the side of a car or a wall become landscapes; the black and white dots of a metal bench play a game. A walk down the street is always a new experience, no matter how many times I've walked down the same street before.

Growing up in a wooded area instilled in me an appreciation and love of nature. If I don't find nature in my environment, I create it in whatever medium I'm working in.

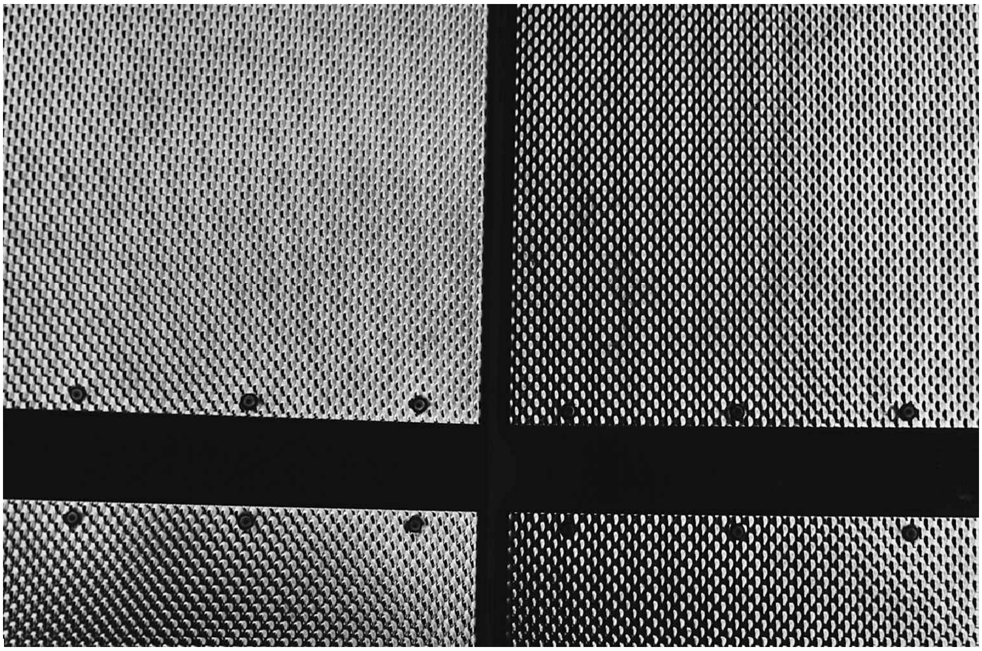
When I photograph, I begin with a subject that is usually seen as harsh, whether it is the side of a car or a concrete wall. These are man-made products that have been brought into the environment by industry. Instead of showing the contrast between nature and industry, I have chosen to turn our synthetic landscape into a softer, more visceral one. My images invite the viewer to enter and explore the space within by creating the illusion of depth and movement.

And, at times, I concentrate on the interaction of real and abstract imagery, the play between nature and man-made materials. Instead of escaping from the world of metal, glass, and cement into total abstraction, I keep some hints of that world.

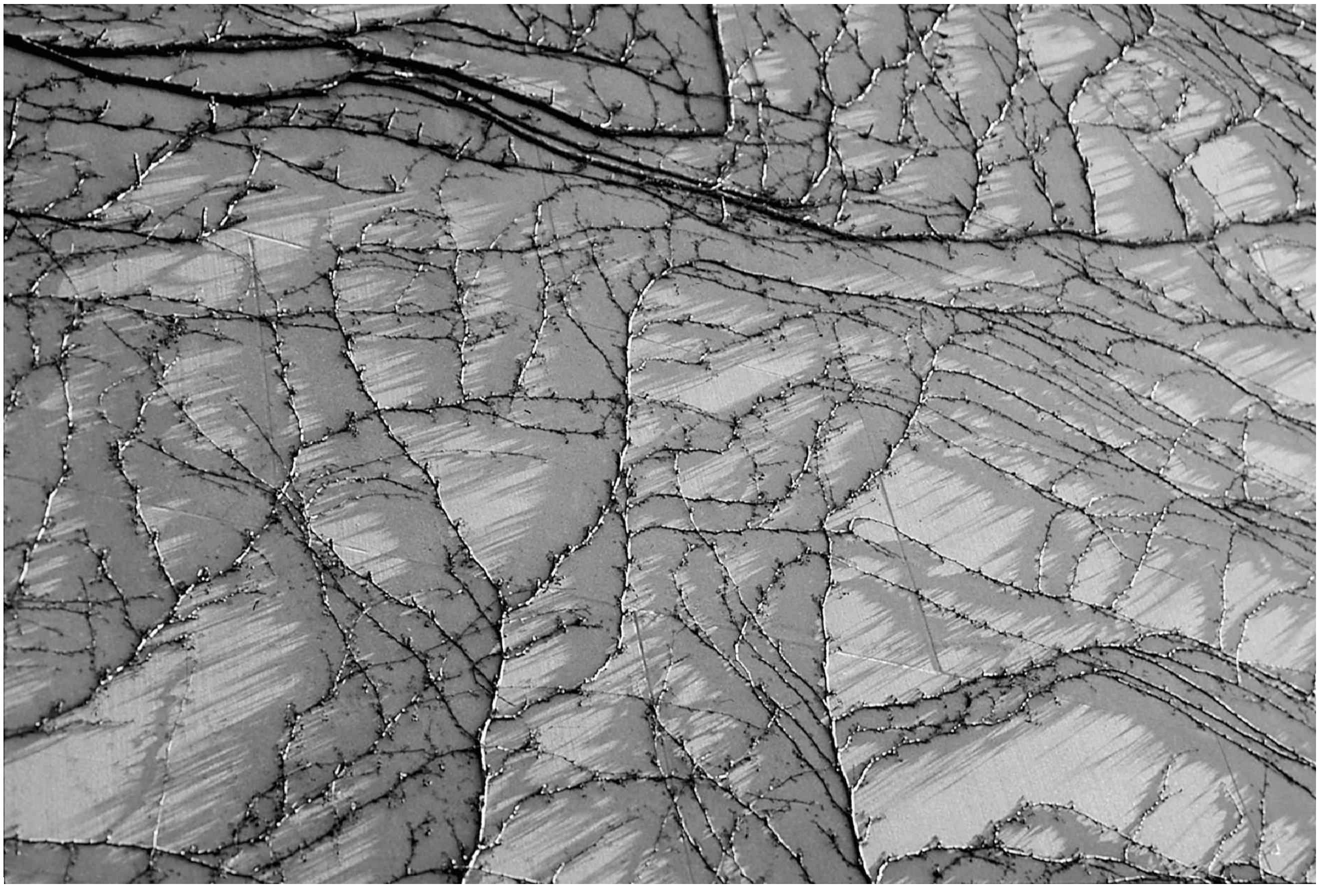
Thinking of photography as two-dimensional dance, I choreograph the different elements within the camera's frame and paint with color and light. For me, a successful photograph or drawing makes visual music. In my opinion, all the arts are interrelated. You may feel the influence of painting, sculpture, dance, music, and poetry in my artwork.

I hope that my photographs will evoke a mood or feeling. Each viewer will see something personal and different. I encourage you to use your imagination.

Emily Sper photographing a metal bench in London.

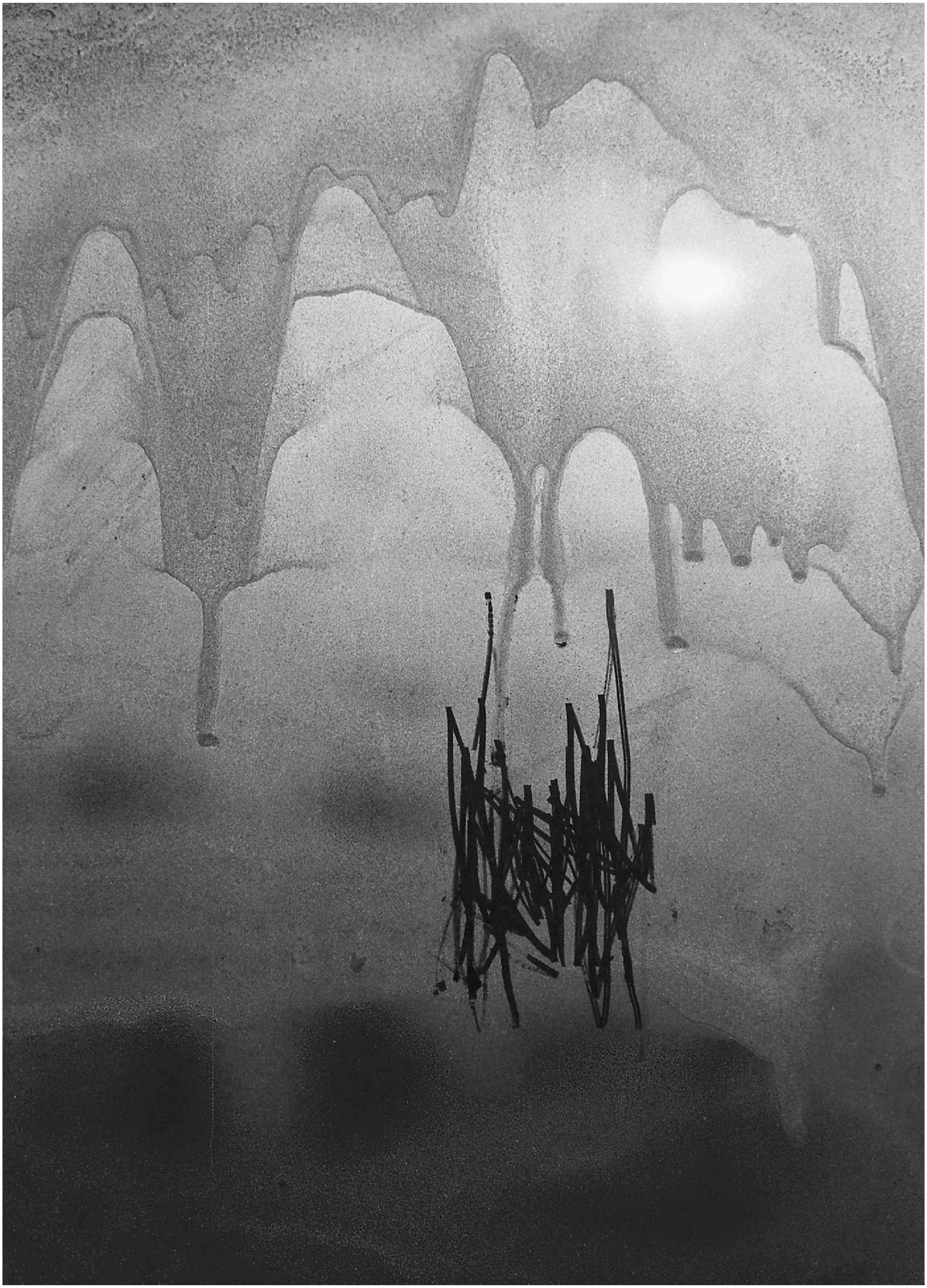


Bench



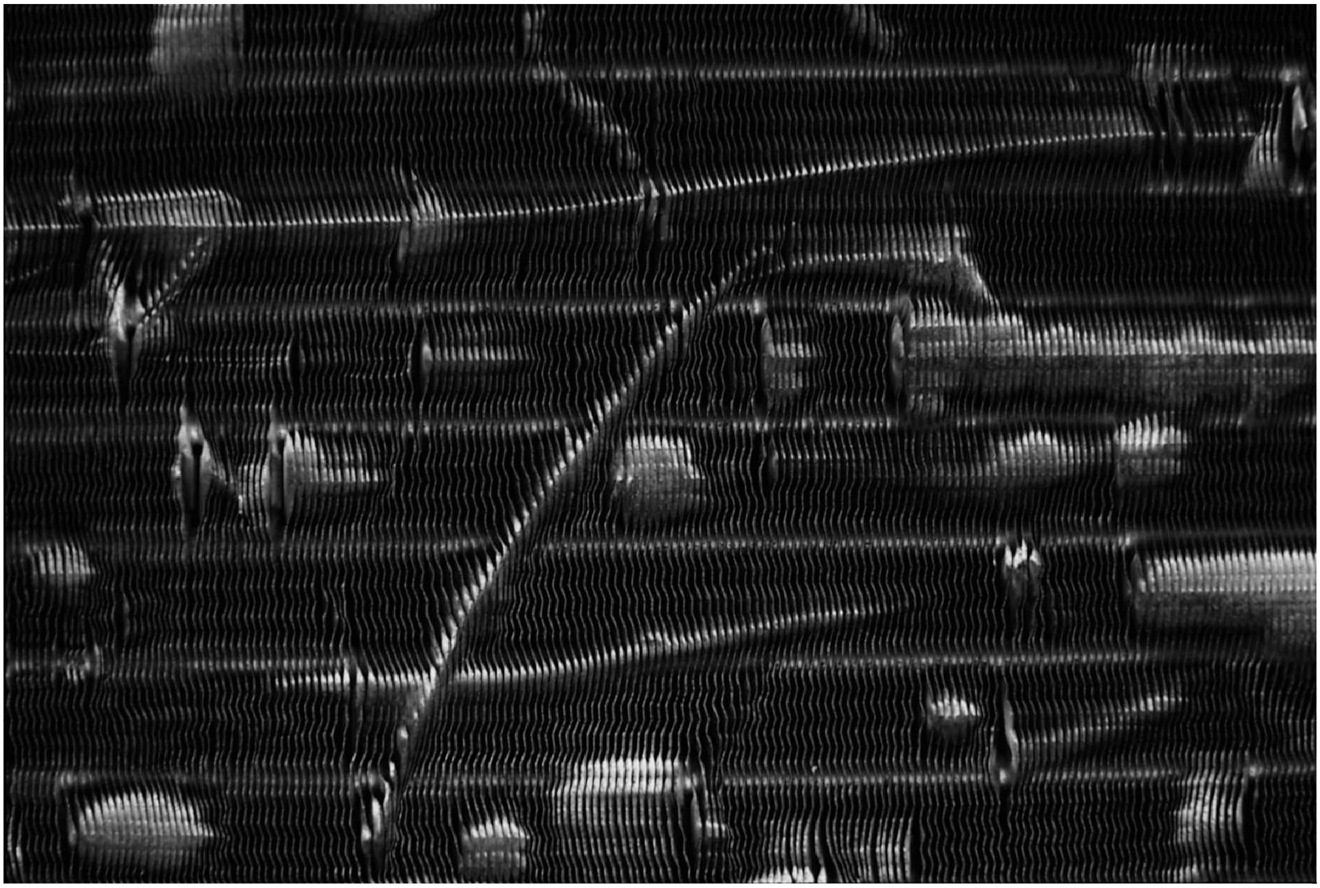
Vines on Wall

Car I

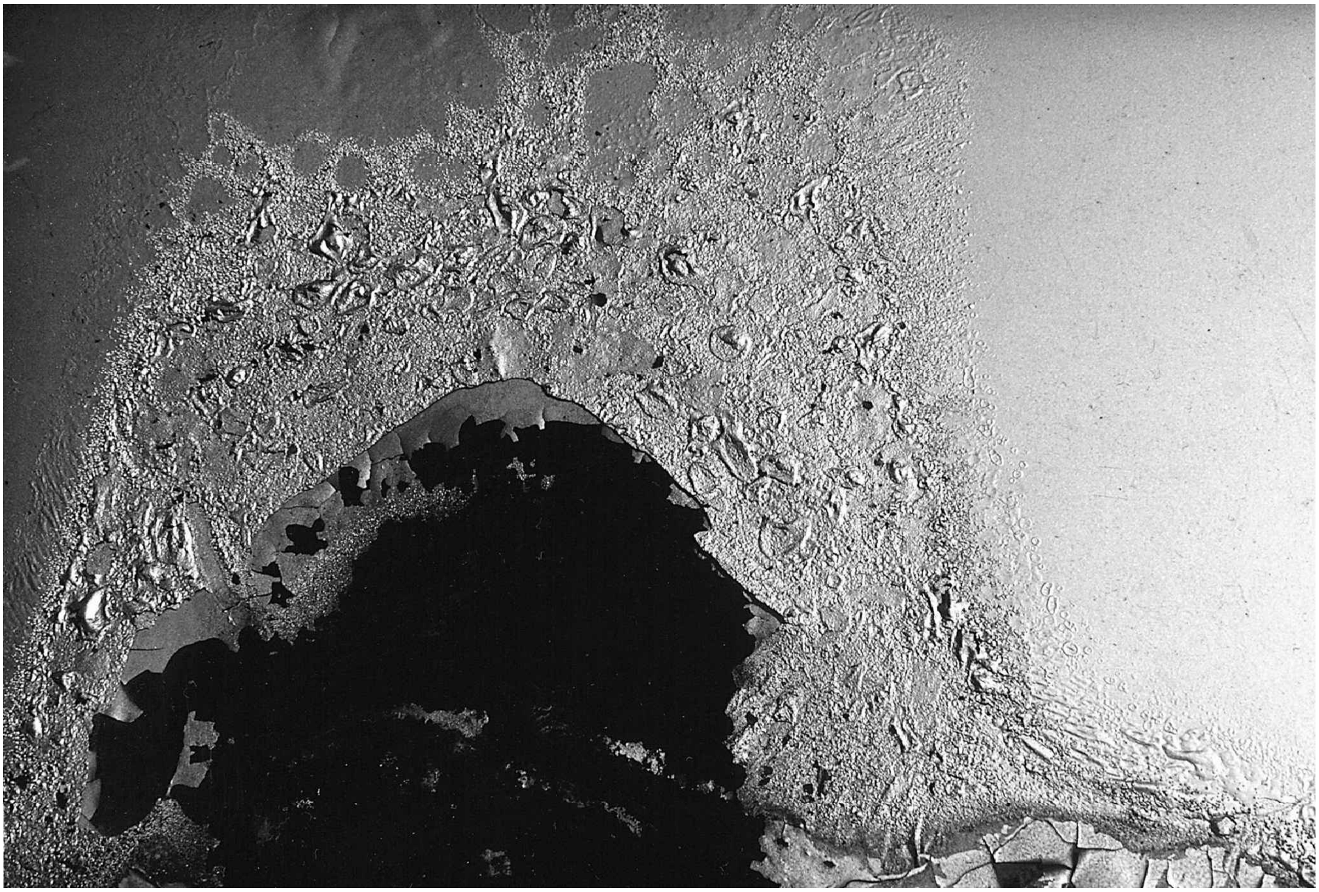


Van


Wall


Radiator

Water on Glass

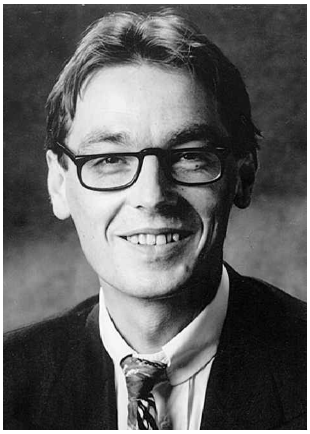


Car II

Conversation with John Kao

C. Otto Scharmer

John Kao
CEO
The Idea Factory



C. Otto Scharmer
Lecturer, MIT Sloan School of Management
Lecturer, University of Innsbruck, Austria
Research Partner, Generon Consulting

Dubbed a "serial innovator" by The Economist, *John Kao is a thought leader for the New Economy and a Tony-nominated producer and business pioneer. Kao is the founder and CEO of The Idea Factory. Combining salient elements of design studio, production company, and theater, The Idea Factory offers new methodologies to firms seeking to embed innovation in their organizations. Kao has also founded other companies in areas such as advanced tissue engineering, next-generation cancer diagnostics, and feature film production.*

Kao is the author of Jamming: The Art and Discipline of Business Creativity, *a* Business Week *bestseller that has been published in 20 languages. He is also co-editor of* Innovation *(1997), published by HarperBusiness as part of its Business Masters series. His other publications include the monograph "Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Organization" (1989) and the book series* Managing Creativity *(1991),* The Entrepreneur *(1991), and* The Entrepreneurial Organization *(1991), all published by Prentice Hall.*

Kao has been active in the entertainment industry as a consultant and producer. He served as production executive on sex, lies, and videotape*; executive producer of* Mr. Baseball*; and producer of* Golden Child, *which was produced on Broadway and nominated for three Tony awards, including Best Play. He recently produced and directed a feature length documentary film based on* Jamming. *He is co-chairman of Ealing Studios in London and cofounder and director of Escador, a pan-European e-services company.*

C. Otto Scharmer conducted the interview, which was held at The Idea Factory, San Francisco, on April 12, 2000, jointly with Ikujiro Nonaka, professor, Hitotsubashi University. The interview is part of a McKinsey–Society of Organizational Learning Leadership Project (1999–2000).

C. Otto Scharmer (COS): Let me ask you my eight questions at the start. What underlying issue does your work address? What do you consider the blind spot of the twentieth century in your field? What is the essence of the creative process? What environments foster the creative and entrepreneurial process? What is the relationship between creation and awareness? What can improve the quality of awareness, both individually and across companies and systems? What are you currently working on? And, finally, how does all this relate to the more personal context of your own journey?

John Kao: Professor Nonaka once introduced me to an audience by saying that I come from many contexts, which probably relates to my interest in the subject of innovation and creativity. It's hard for me to pin down the one context I come from. I was born in the United States of parents who had come to the US from China only a few years before. My parents were academics, had graduate degrees, and had to make the leap to being new immigrants. Growing up in New York, I would wake up inside a Chinese house, leave, and go into American society to an American school with American friends—then come home again to this Chinese house.

Every day I had to make the transition from one world to another and then back again. My challenge at a very early age was to take these two different, often conflicting contexts and put them together in a way that allowed me to live my life. If I reflect on one theme, it's that every time I've been somewhere new, I've figured out some way to combine different contexts. When I was in college, I didn't do just one program of study; I did two and combined them. One was philosophy, primarily nineteenth and twentieth century European philosophy; the other was behavioral science. I did all the integration inside my head.

In the 1980s, when I was teaching at Harvard Business School, I would fly to Los Angeles once a month where I worked on film projects as a movie producer. I would change contexts from the academic environment to Hollywood and then back again. My life has always been about making these journeys back and forth between different contexts.

Career 1: Musician

I've had a number of different career goals, so maybe one of my specialties is serial retirement. My first career goal was to be a musician: I wanted to be a concert pianist. Nobody told me that there were only 20 people in the world who make a living by being concert pianists. When I was in college in the sixties, I wanted to be a rock-and-roll star. The high point of my musical career was playing for three months with Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention in LA when I was 18.

Career 2: Jungian Psychoanalyst

It was hard to improve on that, so I decided I was going to become a Jungian psychoanalyst. Jung appealed to me because he had a very integrative perspective. To do that, I had to go to medical school, and then I did a residency, a post-doctoral program in psychiatry, at Harvard Medical School. Then I decided that I didn't want to stay in medicine, because I did not want to be a researcher in an academic medical environment or a clinician. But I learned an incredible amount that continues to be valuable to me today.

Career 3: Professor at Harvard Business School

In 1980, at age 29, I became a first-year MBA student at Harvard Business School. In the spring of my first year, they approached me about joining the faculty, which was somewhat unusual. They were very interested in my background in psychiatry. They thought they did not have enough of the soft stuff to offset the more traditional business disciplines.

The other job I considered seriously was as head of a film production company in Hollywood. I decided that being an assistant professor at Harvard Business School was better because it would allow me to do different kinds of things. I joined the faculty in 1982. When I wanted to start my own course on entrepreneurship and creativity, it provoked a really ambivalent response. A lot of my colleagues warned me that this was not a good subject to teach. It was too soft, and everything was already known about the subject, so "don't risk your career," they said. That, of course, was a real invitation to go forward rapidly.

I launched a course called "Entrepreneurship, Creativity, and Organization." Some 1,900 Harvard MBAs took it. The reason I was able to stay at Harvard for 14 years was partly because the students responded. They knew the New Economy had to do with entrepreneurs, high-tech, and entertainment. I had cases on George Lucas, Richard Branson's Virgin Group, the video game industry, and Lotus Development Corporation when these were not considered important companies.

I stopped wearing a suit and tie to class fairly early. Harvard faculty had this norm that you had to dress like an executive when you were teaching. You had to have a really expensive suit and shiny shoes and everything. I started wearing jeans or chinos and sweaters. Some of my colleagues were very offended. I said, look, all the people I'm studying—who are real CEOs of real companies—dress like this. They don't wear suits. How can I wear a suit if I'm going to teach material about their companies? I don't think they were convinced, but in any event, that's what I said.

Career 4: Founding and Co-creating Companies

During that period, I began to start companies. The typical faculty extracurricular activity is to teach executive programs or do some consulting. I thought, why don't I take my day a week and start some companies? In 1986, I started a biotech company in the tissue-engineering business. If you have a burn, we take a little bit of your skin, grow it in a lab, and give it back to you. It's your skin, but 10,000 times larger. It can cover your body if you have bad burns or some other problem. The same company now manufactures cartilage and other kinds of tissues.

A blue-chip roster of venture capital companies financed the company, and it ultimately went public. I was the first person working on this company; it was just a pile of paper on my desk. I found a CEO, wrote the business plan, raised the money, and over about six months, pulled it together.

COS: And where did that idea come from?

John Kao: I personally knew a scientist at Harvard Medical School who had originated this technology. He wanted to do something with his patents. People who had been severely burned had no place to go because there was no cure in those days.

I thought to myself, gee, I sit around a day a week for six months, I've got these papers, and I talk on the phone. Then I've got this company, and all of a sudden, it's worth something. So that's when I began to start companies. The Idea Factory is number ten. About three years ago, I decided that my time at Harvard was over. When you are somebody who is not a standard guy playing by the standard rules, you need someone who's going to look out for you. My mentor and protector at Harvard Business School was the dean, John McArthur. He offered me the job when I was a first-year student. Whenever somebody wanted to cut my head off, he would protect me. So I could do whatever I wanted to do. This is an interesting point about innovation. If I had had to obey the rules and act like everybody else, I wouldn't have stayed at HBS because I wouldn't have been happy. McArthur was the necessary ingredient because he ran interference for me. Or, as he put it, he provided air cover so that I could go about my business. When he left, it became clear that it was time for me to leave as well.

. . .the ideas we had about innovation were not adequate for creating best practices in what we now understand is the New Economy.

If you boiled down what people knew about innovation, it had to do with two things. One was *ideation.* How do you generate new ideas? There's a very mature set of disciplines relating to ideation. The other was the *product development literature,* which comes right from manufacturing and the old economy: "Let's figure out our process and make it as efficient as possible. We'll vary the conditions so we can get more performance, but we're not going to add innovation to organizational priorities like how we're managed or structured or how we develop strategy. We're going to see it in a narrow way, which is developing products and services based on our core assumptions about our business."

I'd been spending a lot of time with companies that are driven by innovation: film companies, software companies, biotech companies. I knew that, even in the early 1980s, there was going to be an explosion with lots of start-ups, lots of capital. The power balance between established companies and new companies was going to change. I thought the ideas we had about innovation were not adequate for creating best practices in what we now understand is the New Economy. When you have thousands of companies being created to pursue opportunities and an abundance of talent and capital and people pursuing nontraditional career paths, all the conditions for innovation change. If you buy into the distinction of disruptive versus sustaining innovation, the whole new game versus existing game argument, it's even more different. Almost all the innovation practices I knew from the academic literature had to do with the old economy and incremental improvement, not with game-changing, transformative kinds of innovation.

Career 5: The Idea Factory 1.0

I moved out to San Francisco because I had the idea of creating a company with the theme of innovation. I said I'm going to call it The Idea Factory. I wanted it to be the kind of situation where, when somebody walks in, I tell them the company has a mission of reinventing innovation for the New Economy.

COS: Can you explain how that idea took shape in your mind?

John Kao: First, I wanted to have a physical environment. I knew in my bones that innovation happens in places. That's why artists have studios and Hollywood has protected enclaves where you have to go through a guard's gate and have a pass to get onto a studio lot. There are all kinds of ceremonial elements to make sure people know that there's a distinction between ordinary life and the creative environment where the work goes on.

I get myself into predicaments when I want to learn things, because I go out and commit to something that I don't know how to do. In doing that, I learn something—and hopefully I don't embarrass myself too much.

There's a group called the International Design Conference of Aspen (IDCA), which is the Cadillac of design groups in the United States. I told them that I thought they were missing the boat because designers are really much more important to the mainstream business than they realized. Instead of having a conference on design in the post-Bauhaus era or about fashion, I told them they should have a conference on the new relationship between design and business, reinventing the business of design, reinventing the design of business. They suggested I do the conference. So I did. On the same stage, we had the digital designers who invented the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park;* coexisting with Saul Bass, the leading graphic designer in the United States; coexisting with Tom Peters, who spoke for free; along with my friend Hatim Tjaby´I, who was then CEO of Verifone, one of the most innovative companies around.

So I got a chance to hang out with some of the best designers in the world. A lot of them had offices that are not dissimilar from The Idea Factory—very unstructured, open environments that were deeply interesting, where the physical shell and the furniture and the way people interacted all combined to create a kind of ambience. Most companies that say they create knowledge don't have a place where that happens. They have these places called conference rooms, which are really like hotels, but the kind of hotels you rent for about two hours for furtive activity. All the knowledge is in your desk, and then you bring it to the conference room. You might have an incredible meeting where you lay things out, and somebody lays other things out, and there's a lot of meaning in the relationship between things tacked on the wall. But then you have to take it all down and put it away, because somebody else has to use the space.

. . . what would happen if you had a place for innovation where knowledge could live . . . and not . . . be put away because of . . . scheduling constraints?

My question was, what would happen if you had a place for innovation where knowledge could live there on its own schedule and not have to be put away because of some other scheduling constraints? What would it be like to have a physical space where you could create experiences? I had been groping toward this for years.

Career 6: Producing Films and Lessons from Hollywood

I didn't mention that, in 1989, I was involved with producing my first film, *sex, lies & videotape,* which won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. I was one of the financiers.

COS: Really, you did that?

John Kao: Yes, I thought I knew something, so then I produced *Mr. Baseball*. The film was never widely shown in Japan, but it was about an American baseball player who goes to Japan to play baseball for an American team.

I got involved in the details of producing movies in the eighties and knew what it felt like to be on a sound stage with a director and a crew of 150 people, spending $200,000 a day trying to get certain kinds of shots, dealing with all the uncertainties of production. In a funny way, that was a precursor to thinking about how to manage an innovation-oriented environment in an innovation-oriented business. A lot of the Hollywood model is relevant for innovation. Hollywood doesn't make uniformly wonderful movies, but they have a process for making movies that works well enough to get movies made.

COS: What process things are you thinking of?

John Kao: Every movie starts with *one person who is the prime mover*. It could be the person who has the idea, a producer who gets interested in a subject matter, or a director who's interested in something.

They then hire staff so they have a *custom-made contingency work force* for that project. Then they let the staff go. Everyone is an independent contractor, so there's a huge amount of negotiation involved in putting a team together.

There are also behavioral norms for *collaboration* in Hollywood that are very functional. People make fun of Hollywood, because everybody's so nice and never says no. There's a certain functionality in the positive aspects of collaboration, because people bond very quickly. When you go on a set and have a job to do, you almost immediately can meet the person who has the information you need and who then makes it easy to get what you need done. Their job is to create lubricated relationships that work well instantly, even though they've never met you.

That's also true in the structure of innovation, in the institutional sense. In the early twentieth century, there were movie studios that were the so-called "dream factories," with walls around them. There was an economic logic for that because some elements of production were scarce. Some people knew how to do certain things, like setting up lights, and the studios needed to make sure that spies for other companies could not see how they did things. Value always migrates to what is scarce, and in this early stage in Hollywood, what was scarce was production knowledge. Actors were cheap; anybody who looked good could go in front of the camera because they didn't have to talk in the silent movie era. Hollywood has a fascinating history of innovation, because the organizational models and business models evolved to keep pace with different, evolving power dynamics among different players.

It seemed to me the elements of a design-oriented business that borrowed from theater, from Hollywood, and from the world of traditional design would begin to accomplish my goal. The question was, what are the new practices around innovation in the New Economy? How does innovation have to work in the New Economy? My conclusion was that the people who had those answers were probably not strategy consultants, business school professors, or heads of product development. People outside those traditional disciplines, from places like improvisational acting, scenario planning, and the anthropology of customers, had the new ideas. The history of The Idea Factory has been the history of *weaving* together different disciplines to try to find this new toolbox.

COS: What was the *blind spot* that applied only to the old economy?

John Kao: It's not even one blind spot; it's the fact that, on the one hand, if innovation practices are focused on ideation, all you'll get is a bunch of ideas. But ideas are easy, and they don't necessarily lead to value. If you are just tweaking your product development process, you won't get outside a narrow product orientation, and you also won't really put yourself in the best position to come up with radical, game-changing innovation.

If there is any attribute of the New Economy, it is that you have to be fast. You have to do a lot of new things in a highly experimental way. You're moving toward uncertain outcomes because you don't know how things are going to turn out. You have to make bets. You have to take a position on what you're going to do, relative to your competition. Things are moving so fast that to sit still or to simply optimize processes is not an option. You have to be doing this innovation stuff continuously. So the question then becomes, what are the practices that enable that kind of speed and continuity and volume of innovation activities?

Elements of an Emerging New Model

COS: If you were to describe these new practices and the process around which they align themselves, what are the core elements of the emerging new model?

John Kao: One is *design*. Design is an innovation process that is not just figuring out a specification and then filling in the picture. Design is creating interim understandings of what you want that you then work hard to go beyond. Specifically, it's a process of prototyping, which is modeling or simulating your best current understandings precisely so that you can have a shared set of understandings that enable communication, especially among people from different disciplines. You break the prototype and iterate, prototype and iterate, until you get to some desired outcome that you could not have predicted at the beginning.

Most designers understand that when you start improving a toaster, the way you get to the place where you stop and say, "I like that end point," is a process that cannot be predicted. It's like jazz. You have to achieve a balance between structure and freedom to get to that end point. It's not like engineering, where you start with a specification, and then, if you do all the things that specification says, you get to the end point. You do get to the end point, but you also exclude all the other branches of the tree. Design is about enabling any relevant branch to be traveled on to get to that end point.

The essence of design is prototyping and iteration. It's a process for getting to unpredicted outcomes. My thought was, why not apply design to strategy? Why not apply design to organizational structures? Why not apply design to corporate culture?

. . . why not apply design to strategy? Why not apply design to organizational structures? Why not apply design to corporate culture?

The second core element is *theater*. Companies commonly complain that, "We spent all this money on strategy, but nothing changed, nothing happened." In order for an organization to embrace innovation, people have to take risks and be really committed to doing something new. Taking risks means that there are unpleasant outcomes, as well as pleasant ones. You have to allow people to shift their perspective so they see why something is important and develop the commitment to pursue that goal. So if, for instance, I hand you a memo that says we're going to have this thing called the French Revolution, and here are the five reasons, please check here if you're interested in participating, it's not an exciting experience. But if I take you to some revolutionary theater, and I show you bad things that happened and give you a lot of symbols and images and red colors, you'll get very excited and you'll want to do something dramatically different.

Theater goes back to the Greeks. The purpose of theater was to transform people's deep, moral perspective. Moral perspective implies dealing with several large archetypal questions like: What is the good life? How shall the city be governed? Issues that are transcendent—archetypal kinds of questions. These questions are just as relevant to a company as they were to the Greek polis.

Theater is how you transform your perspective and develop an emotional reaction to what you see that changes something profoundly. It addresses the issue of how to create new communication tools that allow the change process to become truly revolutionary. By that, I mean not just sharing content, but creating a context around the content that allows it to become alive in a very immediate way.

The third and final leg of the tripod here at The Idea Factory is the notion that innovation processes aren't simply about an end-to-end product development approach or some periodic ideation. They are about designing *integrated, organizational systems*. In our language, it means designing an idea factory for a company. An idea factory involves addressing issues all the way at the top about leadership. Does leadership really champion innovation? Does leadership make sure that innovation processes and strategy processes are meaningfully integrated?

Then there are all kinds of organizational design issues. Many companies think that if they have one venture development process and one funding mechanism, they're done. I would argue that they've just started. Companies that are great at innovating need to do a lot of different kinds of things, including those that are redundant, messy, overlapping, and inefficient. Companies need to have an innovation portfolio, not just an innovation strategy.

We will often sit down with a company's senior management and actually do an innovation audit. We try to understand the current innovation practices and what they need to be for the company to achieve the desired outcomes. We think through how to build an innovation system with everything, including the tools of compensation, resource allocation, organizational structure, and communication systems. If you are serious about innovation, you're committing yourself to a long road, because innovation touches almost everything about a company.

We are not really a consulting company. And although we have a venture fund now, we're really not a venture capital company. We're not an incubator, because our business is not swapping our services for stock. And we're not a corporate venture team or a corporate venture platform in the conventional sense. We're not any of those conventional approaches to making new things happen, which we might call innovation. We're something different, something new. I can't describe what that thing is, except that the goal of our company is to gather ingredients under one roof. The Idea Factory has a toolbox for developing ideas. The Idea Factory value-added is the talents, capital, and pieces of embedded technology that will speed up the process of creating new, valuable assets. Imagine if we had data-related engineering capabilities or embedded technology that enables business-to-business or business-to-consumer commerce. And imagine that we also had ways of working with large companies. Now we wrap all these things together.

Career 7: The Idea Factory 2.0

What we are doing now is version 2.0 of The Idea Factory. Version 1.0 was big companies coming here and we would work with them and help them change. Version 2.0 is the business of creating assets. We leverage the intellectual capital and The Idea Factory assets in order to create new companies, new joint ventures, or new business containers around intellectual capital so that interesting, new things can happen.

We also try to find high-leverage opportunities to deploy our intellectual capital. For instance, we're setting up a network to deploy Idea Factories in different European countries. We're doing some interesting advisory work for the US government and for some branches of international government. We think those are great opportunities to take our intellectual capital and have it touch a lot of people's lives. I can't tell you what the outcome of version 2.0 will be because I don't have a clear picture of it right now.

COS: In the 1.0 version, you charge for service. What's the business model in the 2.0 version?

John Kao: The business model of 2.0 is—through friendships, alliances, business tie-ups, joint ventures, spin-outs, start-ups, or whatever—to use our Idea Factory assets, our people, our embedded technology, our capital, and our processes to create new, valuable companies; new, valuable processes; new, valuable joint ventures; or new corporate spin-outs that will have an asset value, an economic value as opposed to a fee-for-service, economic model. We're still going to do consulting, but we're going to expand our model to focus more on asset creation.

COS: If you look at the whole ecology of entrepreneurship, you are describing a generative field where various ventures evolve and then develop. If you take the three elements that you described—design, theater, and the systems approach—along with the field that you just indicated, what keeps it all together and ensures that it remains a living system that continues to bring forth innovation and entrepreneurial action?

Creating an Innovation Keiretsu

John Kao: In a way, it's a *keiretsu*, an innovation keiretsu. Part of what makes the keiretsu work, the glue, is that there's a certain amount of *cross-ownership*. For example, I'm working with a technology company in the business of creating business-to-business exchanges in market spaces. We're talking about swapping 1% of our stock, because we have comparable valuation. When I call them to do a project for us, I want them to feel that they are obligated. We're a part of them, they're a part of us. I'm involved with other projects where there's an equity link.

Another part or glue that makes the keiretsu work is that there are *people who see the whole picture,* rather than only parts, the local layer. I recently bought a movie studio in England with some partners. Now we have this very beautiful, old-fashioned British movie studio in my keiretsu. So we've got that, The Idea Factory, and a venture fund. My job increasingly is to weave these connections back and forth. Because I'm on such good terms with everybody, they're all interested.

Third is *process glue.* People throughout the system understand how to do certain things in certain ways. We've developed tools and ways to do things that are relevant in different parts of the business. We have a common vocabulary and common understanding around innovation. Here, at The Idea Factory, the people understand how the words are used, what the words mean, and how to communicate. So there's a whole set of processes and process knowledge that holds things together.

Fourth, if we didn't have *interesting projects,* then there would be no glue. What holds things together are projects. One thing we're really good at is coming up with interesting projects. For instance, we're meeting later with people interested in The Idea Factory, in Ealing Studios, in our venture fund, all of it. That project will pull together a lot of different elements.

The fact that our team now has some capital is also glue. People expect that if they come up with a good idea, there will be a way to get things done, and they would rather stick around here than go somewhere else.

COS: Projects, process, and cross-ownership are easy to replicate for other organizations. But the fourth factor is difficult to replicate, because it's John Kao.

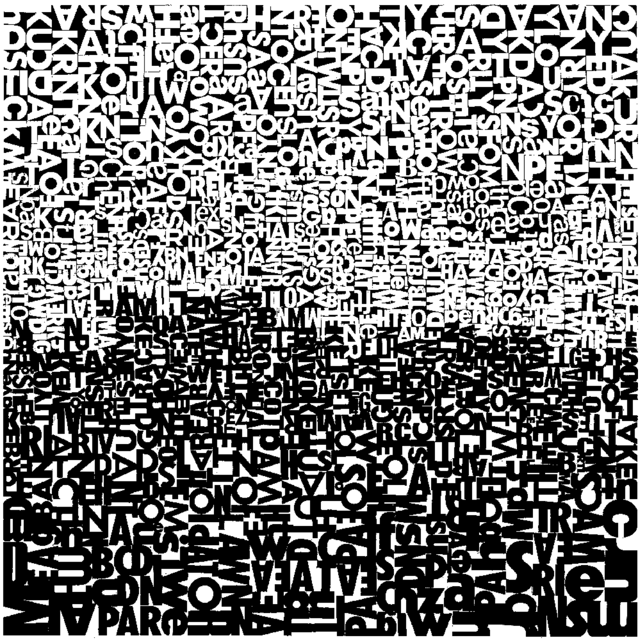
John Kao: Or people who weave things together.

COS: So how do you replicate that?

John Kao: First of all, I don't think processes are a commodity yet, so embedding new kinds of processes in organizations is pretty valuable. But who does the work of weaving things together involves training people in understanding that role. I'm doing a workshop with a very senior group from the US military on how they see their responsibility in managing the knowledge of their organization. They thought it was a very soft issue until I persuaded them that it is probably the most important thing they do. It also is different from being commandants, because you have to be a peer, a colleague, and a facilitator, an enabler, and many other untraditional things. It's a fascinating example of how to move people rapidly from old economy to New Economy, or how to expand their roles for both.

We use cases, simulation, business games, and things like that to train senior people for the role of innovation weaver or what I call producer. In Hollywood, I produce movies. What does that mean? Well, there was an idea I liked. I knew some people whom I could get excited about it. I knew where to get the money. So I was a producer. Without me, these movies wouldn't have happened. Without me, that biotech company would not have happened.

One day, my mother asked me a question that summarizes the confusion of many people about the New Economy. She said, "You know, I've watched you work, and you act like you're not in a hurry, and you talk on the phone a lot, and you kind of sit at your desk, and then you go have lunch with somebody, and all these things hap-



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pen. I don't understand what you do that goes from sitting and talking to the actual creation of these companies and the value and stuff."

People associate value creation with muscle work, very tangible kinds of work. What I do is very intangible and involves time. Actually doing it in an inefficient way is preferable to doing it in an efficient way because ideas need time to germinate, and interactions need time to become richer and more relevant. Talking to people, gathering ideas, or the incubation process cannot be scheduled in a conventional way.

What I do is very intangible and involves time. . . . Ideas need time to germinate, and interactions need time to become richer and more relevant.

I think the architecture of innovation is going to change dramatically over the next five to ten years. Quite a few companies are interested in having some kind of corporate think space or quiet space or slow space where new things can happen. A lot of companies are fiddling around with the architectural principles. But five to ten years from now, it'll be a more commonly understood need, and people will have ways of practicing innovation that are, if not standardized, at least recognized.

Catching the Entrepreneurial Process

COS: When you begin the process your mother described, what do you do first?

John Kao: The first thing is to define what the opportunity is, which is the same as becoming captivated by an idea or a possibility. Any design effort starts with problem definition. The better the problem definition, the more likely you'll have an interesting outcome. I often spend a lot of time with companies, helping them figure out what they want because they know they can benefit from thinking about it more. That provides the foundation for everything else. The more you address the issue of problem definition, the more you see new things. Everything starts because somebody falls in love with an idea or an opportunity. You need the initial spark.

COS: What practices do you use, maybe personal practices, that increase the probability of these sparks emerging?

John Kao: I often try things that I don't know how to do. For instance, when I was teaching at Harvard, I would, a few weeks before starting my course for the year, take a course in something I didn't know anything about. While I was teaching, I was walking into the room as a big professor, and everybody was very respectful. It actually was very helpful to exchange the context by stepping into the student world and experiencing that first.

The space here at The Idea Factory is innovation- and creativity-oriented, but I also have a studio two blocks away. It is just a loft with almost nothing in it except for a stereo, some books, and an exercise bike. It doesn't even have a telephone. I go there when I want to be totally quiet and think about things. This week, I'll probably spend two half-days there, just mulling over stuff. Last week, I was too busy, but this week, I scheduled a few blocks of time to go there and just think.

I also spend a lot of time with different kinds of people. I like to collect relationships with people whose talents I really respect. When I did my little stint on Broadway—I produced a play a couple of years ago—I was working with one of the best directors and one of the best playwrights in the world. Then I mixed that with working with some of the best Internet entrepreneurs. I have as partners some of the best venture capitalists. When that gets boring, I can go talk to my 22-month-old son. That's always interesting.

Ikujiro Nonaka: How does all that relate to the process of jamming?

John Kao: Jamming for me is an important concept and set of practices because it embodies almost everything that people are groping for when they try to figure out how to be more innovative.

I like the metaphor because people actually study how to play jazz. They don't just wish to play jazz; they go to school, they practice, they have exercises to do. There is a knowledge-mastery curve associated with it. It's the perfect way to balance a lot of the paradoxes of innovation, because you start from somewhere, but then you have to go somewhere new. You always have to have knowledge, but you have to find ways of being naïve—in a good sense—so you're open to new possibilities. You always have some kind of knowledge or legacy, but you have white space—a beginner's mind.

So navigating through those paradoxes is jamming. Every time a musician plays a note on a keyboard, he is making a choice that resolves that paradox in that moment. It may or may not be the right one, but there is no right and wrong. It's just whatever feels right at that particular moment. Ultimately, you know when it's good, not only by intellectual criteria but by emotional and pattern-completion criteria as well.

Ikujiro Nonaka: How do you develop that capacity?

John Kao: The way you learn jazz is by listening to a lot of jazz. You listen and improvise solo, but then you copy it down, because if you can hear it and write it down, then you know it. Then you put yourself in the situation of performing to gain the experience of collaboration. You cultivate a certain mentality in which the music always sounds better when you don't have a lot of preconceptions about it. If I don't have a lot of preconceived ideas, I can get back to a beginner's mind.

Jazz musicians understand that you need a special environment to try out new things. You have to believe that you can do something great, because you can't prove it in advance. That, in a simple way, is the whole issue of creating a culture of innovation: it allows people to be brave. It allows them to step forward and try new things themselves. Companies are not very good at giving their people courage or the belief that something extraordinary can happen. The whole corporate culture agenda around innovation boils down to: How do you create a brand identity for innovation that allows people to be brave, step forward, and do new things?

COS: We talked about the initial stage of the entrepreneurial creative process—opening the mind and allowing the sparks to emerge. Could you describe what would be the next? What are the practices that you would use in order to nudge the process on?

John Kao: Ideas are easy; they're just the starting point. Designers understand that the goal is to translate that idea immediately into some tangible form, like prototypes, so that you can begin the real work of innovation. Having a prototyping process within an innovation-oriented environment that allows the prototype to be done on its own terms, on its own schedule, would be the next step.

It's important to avoid linearity, which is characteristic of a lock-step industrial process. In the future, innovation in companies will happen in many different ways. Sometimes an idea pops up out of a strategy meeting. It'll be an accident that occurs in a prototyping environment. Or somebody in the company meets with the customer, and a new idea pops out. Or maybe somebody shows up with a business plan that's recognized as valuable.

I think the image of a linear process is less appropriate than the image of a game board. It's like the difference between golf and pinball. Golf is a linear game where you have to hit all 18 holes and then you're done. In pinball, the ball goes wherever it wants, and you never can predict the path. The ball itself kind of traces a path through the landscape. In a funny way, the innovation environments that work well allow an idea to move around in that highly unpredictable way. Then form follows function; function does not follow form.

COS: But in order to do that, you need this differentiated ecology of enabling spaces, right? You described prototyping and tapping into tacit knowledge. Are those the two main enabling spaces? What are the others?

John Kao: There needs to be a holding space at the senior management/strategy/formulating level. There need to be shared understandings and shared space between those people and the people doing a particular project. Where is the knowledge about the marketplace and customers held? Where is the knowledge about technology? Where's the knowledge about the technology landscape? There are a number of different agendas.

There's no one way to design the corporate innovation ecology in terms of a suite of spaces. You need to have a sense of all these different elements in the innovation mix. For a lot of companies, it may be as simple as having one space that can be used in many different ways, trying it, learning from it, and then progressing to a next step.

I've been looking at the decision-support environment of the US government. They spend a lot of money on situation rooms, war rooms, and rooms with a lot of computer technology and nice furniture. We're trying to understand where they should go to accomplish true collaboration. A lot of rooms are used to rubber-stamp ideas, not to come up with something dramatically new, which is what's needed in a crisis. What are the enabling conditions for good thinking in that kind of environment? We don't know. The best thing is to have a room that can function in different ways and that can be flexible.

The Intangible Essence of The Idea Factory

COS: You said The Idea Factory is not about what you see; it's not the tangible, it's the intangible. You've described a lot of concrete practices and spaces. What is the essence of the intangible Idea Factory? And how does it relate to the topic of qualities of awareness?

John Kao: I'm not sure I would say that it is all intangibles. The physical environment and the physical properties we have here are significant. For instance, when people come here because they want to develop e-business strategy and we let them play our e-business war game for a few days, that's a highly tangible process. People get physical items that increase the intensity of the experience in their physical environment and interaction with other real people.

Is process knowledge intangible? It is and it isn't. A lot of our process knowledge resides in tools. They could be as simple as a template for writing things in, or something online, or a way of visualizing complicated relationships. We have many different approaches to modeling languages. We don't say that any one is the right one; we let people try out different approaches, or we recommend different approaches based on our intuition.

People come to a place that is supposed to be about innovation. They expect when coming here that something interesting will come out of it. There's a safe-space phenomenon; people are away from their day-to-day environments. We have no difficulty getting people engaged here, even though they might come from left-brain, bureaucratic environments. It's easy to create a feeling of fun here. The physical environment changes the way people relate to each other.

It's hard to figure out what the *absolute essence* is. Clearly, putting together a team that functions like a high-performance jazz group is a lot of it. We are now at the stage where we almost don't have to talk about what we're doing.

Learning in Performance: How a Dutch Company Transformed Itself

FEATURE

Philip H. Mirvis, Karen Ayas, and George L. Roth

Introduction

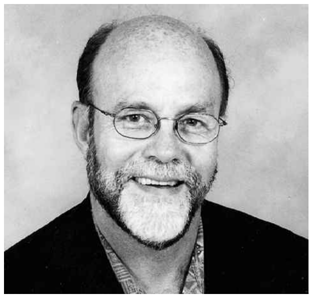
In February 2000, we were with Tex Gunning, then chairman of Van den Bergh Netherlands (VdBN), a foods division of Unilever, and 200 leadership team members in Wadi Rum, a valley amid jutting mountains in the Jordanian desert. The team leaders, stirred by a morning camel ride, unfolded their previously prepared, annotated time lines of important events in their work lives, beginning in 1995. Nestled in mountain crevices, the leaders, grouped in business teams, swapped "stories" about the reasons for successes and failures. Later, around a campfire, they unfurled cloth banners that recorded each team's experiences, and business heads cum "tribe leaders" summed up the lessons. This process, which continued for another day and a half, was carried forward at the firm's annual learning conference where 1,800 employees joined their team leaders, shared their own story lines, and broadened the circle of reflection and learning.

Before moving to his next assignment, Gunning wanted to document the transformation of VdBN during his five-year tenure. So, in late 1999, we began a learning history to identify key transforming events, find their meaning and significance, and assess their impact on employees and the business. In so doing, we wanted to involve all concerned in the analysis of events and detailing of lessons learned.

The learning history was the joint effort of a team of action researchers, including us and several leaders from VdBN. Every employee, selected managers from Unilever, and various suppliers and contractors contributed to the findings. The formal process began when Gunning and Philip Mirvis, a consultant to the company, compared notes about the transformation and developed a set of "action theories" to interpret what had happened and why. In Jordan and later gatherings, the hope was that engaging leaders in evocative storytelling at memorable venues would itself be a historic event in the company's time line and carry the lessons forward with added vigor (see Part III on using a learning history as an intervention).

The transformation story began in 1995 with the appointment of Gunning as chairman and the turnaround of the Unox factory and brand. It continued with the merger of several Unilever food businesses under one flag in 1997 and the decision of the management board to have 200 leaders. It continued through 1998 to 2000 with large-scale events, like that in the desert of Jordan, designed to mark progress, develop and deepen the changes in the business and culture, and create a legacy of growth.

The learning history of VdBN is a chronological story of events and experiences, covering the two cycles of change. The first transformation concerns Unox, which has meat, sauce, and soup factories in the south of Holland. The second transformation involves the merging of Unox into VdBN, headquartered in Rotterdam, to create the largest food manufacturer in Holland. Of the total current workforce in VdBN, about 800 employees have lived through both transformations.



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Each transformation had a unifying vision, captured in the slogan, "Competing for our future," that appeared on hats and clothing, on company flags, and as a recurring theme at companywide gatherings. This growth message was expressed quantitatively in "stretch targets" and unit-specific performance measurements. A mix of "hard" and "soft" changes were implemented, based on these analyses and goals. At Unox and later VdBN, the hard side of change involved restructuring, asset sales, and staff reductions, along with the formation of business units and introduction of profit-and-loss accounting and responsibilities. On the soft side, new types of management meetings, staff training, team building, and organizational development efforts were launched.

One unassailable conclusion is that the business grew during the five years. The overall rate of growth, in sluggish categories in a mature industry, was 4% per annum. The foods business unit, which introduced several new products, entered new markets, and used new channels to fuel the growth engine, grew by 13% in 1999. The fats business unit, after prior years of decline, stabilized volumes, increased market share, and grew several of its brands. Efficiencies in several factories improved from 60% to more than 80%, and trading losses decreased dramatically.

A key conclusion of the learning history is that these results have been neither incremental nor routine. On the contrary, they have been shaped by business breakthroughs and innovative change management. We found that the change process at VdBN has been guided by a set of principles, often tacit and unspoken. For instance, transformations typically begin with an awakening—the aims of which are to focus attention on the "current reality," break through denial and resistance, and create urgency for change. In both Unox in 1995 and VdBN in 1997, there were orchestrated efforts to "wake up" the organization to current problems and foreseeable performance gaps. But the wake-up calls were noteworthy on two counts. First, attention-getting events, rich in substance and symbolism, helped to ensure that all employees understood the depth of problems and need for action. Second, these emotive experiences were complemented by intellectual rigor: Andersen Consulting and other experts worked with the leaders to analyze each situation thoroughly and identify areas for change.

Tracking these two cycles of transformation suggests that VdBN leaders have, over this period, been learning to manage change proactively. The change management methods introduced in the first transformation—from a symbolic awakening and assessment of current reality to the detailing of a vision and implementation of new ways of working—are replicated in the second transformation. Efforts to mobilize people are similar in the two cases, albeit more encompassing and engaging in the second.

Companywide gatherings called learning conferences spread and deepened the transformation process at Unox. This was amplified even more in the second transformation cycle at VdBN through culture-building events, such as team-leader days and annual retreats, plus the elaboration of learning conferences through preparatory and follow-up activities.

While some facets of change management at VdBN were carefully planned, others were more or less improvised (see the sidebar, an interview with Tex Gunning). The real story of leadership and transformation at VdBN is the "holistic integration" of activities or, more colloquially, the "art of management." This was the result of continuous experimentation and learning, a mix of planning and improvisation, and space for serendipity.

Rites and rituals are universal: tribes everywhere, ancient and modern, use them to mark time and achievements.

Events, increasingly more sophisticated and engaging, punctuated the growth of leaders and development of company culture. Rites and rituals are universal: tribes everywhere, ancient and modern, use them to mark time and achievements. These events, which might be termed "performances," are unusual in business and have been singular at VdBN for their creativity, scale, and impact.

Next, in Part I, we elaborate on the idea of marking progress and creating change via events and underscore the performative aspects of the VdBN transformation story. In Part II, Karen Ayas provides a first-person account of the team leaders' event in the Jordanian desert in February 2000—a "performance" that marks collectively the leadership passage. In Part III, George Roth describes how a learning history becomes a "real time" intervention and part of the performance in Jordan.

Part I. Leading Change: From Process to Performance

Scene 1

In a Unox warehouse in the south of Holland, a fleet of forklifts has amassed 10,000 pallets, stacked floor to ceiling with canned food labeled "waste." This crisp morning, buses arrive from three nearby factories. Managers and their cost accountants, quality experts and production workers—some 1,600 employees—tour aisles of spoiled material, count the massive loss of money, and contemplate the waste of their own time and talents. The stage is set for outbursts and resentment, analysis and confrontation, and later acknowledgement and first steps toward a new way.

Scene 2

Eighteen months later, skaters glide on frozen canals through Holland. It's that special spontaneous holiday, *ElfStedenTocht*, when waterways linking 11 cities freeze over, and the nation takes a day off to play. Along the waterways, the same Unox employees, now numbering only 800 due to restructuring and asset sales, hand out bright orange stocking caps that bear the Unox logo. To conclude the day, the employees, vigorous and proud, assemble en masse, strip off all but their orange hats, and dash into the wintry North Sea. Later, tens of thousands of skaters, in towns large and small, are pictured on national television and on the front pages of newspapers wearing the orange hats.

Scene 3

A year and a half later, in the cellar of a medieval monastery in Belgium's Ardennes forest, some 200 leaders from Unox and its merger partner VdBN hop from one cold foot to another as they wait to hear the words of their chairman. There are no histrionics on spoiled food this time. Instead he speaks from the heart about the death of his father, his abusive family, the highs and lows of his schooling, and his career. As he finishes, a young supervisor shouts out, "Thank you for sharing that, Tex. It's good to know you better." The leaders then share their own "emotional life stories" and talk about their lives and work, who they are, and what has shaped them. In the small group discussions and whole-group dialogues that follow, there is the sense that this is something new and important in their dealings with one another.

In the language of business and the social sciences, the vignettes above describe processes. While definitions vary in specific applications, processes in general involve the ordering of tasks and activities across time and space, with specified steps from A to B. There are well-mapped processes concerning the flow of work, patterns of communication and control, steps in problem solving and decision making, and so on. Managers, in turn, are expected to apply process thinking to production, quality control, and service delivery tasks, and to develop processes for change management and organizational learning (Garvin, 1998).

Each scene above is an element in a process. For instance, the carefully constructed warehouse tour, in process terms, typifies the start of a change effort whereby new information helps to "unfreeze" an enterprise that has grown complacent about quality and stayed profitable through price increases. This event is a prototypical wake-up call—which was followed in this case by intense study of production practices and consumer trends—that helped staff to develop a clear if unforgiving view of current reality.

Outfitting skaters with the orange Unox hats exemplifies an inspired promotion process. Marketing studies had shown that customers were bored with the products, which were losing appeal. Improving the quality might improve taste and, in time, profit margins, but market gains would hinge more on repositioning the product line and giving the brand an updated identity and some sizzle. Interestingly, the skating event not only associated the brand with vitality and fun, but also had unanticipated benefits: the buzz enhanced Unox's corporate image and people's pride in their employer.

The meeting in the monastery was emblematic of culture building—a process to blend cultures in the post-merger period (Marks and Mirvis, 1997). The chairman used behavioral processes when presenting his life story to model openness for the staff,

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stimulate dialogue, and demonstrate the commonality in stories from people in two different companies. This not only hastened development of rapport between merging staffs, but also sped up their fact-finding and collaborative efforts.

Performativity

In the language of the arts and the emerging discipline of performance studies, the events described might be termed performances. In each instance, the actions of the leaders and staff are more or less scripted and unfold through scenes. The events themselves are staged, with scenery and actors in place, costumes and props ready, and the chairman cum director exerting a strong or light hand, depending on the performance. The parallels between process and performance are striking: the latter also involves an arrangement of activities across time and space, dramatization with a beginning and end, and activity, termed by scholars of the genre as performativity, that pulls it all together (Carlson, 1996).

This distinction may seem moot. In everyday language, people speak easily of the "art of leadership," read about management as a "performing art," and move toward craftsmanship in labor, harmony in teamwork, and "world-class" performance. But to lift up and focus specifically on the performative aspects of leadership, we believe, offers a fresh, useful way to see, understand, and undertake organizational change.

Let's look again at the "awakening" in the warehouse in theatrical terms. The staging is surreal: the staff's early morning bus ride to an unknown destination; secrecy about its intent and the part they are about to play; stacked pallets whose meaning emerges as the tour progresses; signs detailing the contents, costs, and causes of the mess; all amplified by company officials in white lab coats. As performance, it immerses employees in an unfamiliar, unexpected reality. The sights shock them, the smells from open cans nauseate them, and the sound effects—Mozart's requiem piped over loudspeakers—add another layer of showmanship. The act ends with an aptly staged scene: forklifts move pallets from the warehouse to a nearby pit where the waste is buried.

That change follows a script is not surprising. Anthropologists have documented rites of passage that punctuate change in many cultures, and the idea that cultures enact change through social dramas—in the formula of an upheaval, then conflict and reordering, and finally reintegration—is well established (Turner, 1957). Indeed, a well-known framework characterizes organizational change as a "three-act drama" (Tichy and Sherman, 1993). In these academic uses, however, drama is a metaphor for cultural activity. By comparison, in the case discussed here, the drama is an experience. Indeed, we

Appeal to the Head and the Heart: An Interview with Tex Gunning

Tex Gunning

This interview was held on a gloomy Sunday afternoon in Tex Gunning's office overlooking Rotterdam, in December 1999. Philip Mirvis and Karen Ayas participated in the conversation.

How and when did the emphasis on heart and emotions come into the business?
What I always do is think deeply about where we are in the transformation process. What is the issue? What should be the next move? Where are the people and the leaders? What do they need?

With the merger, we had had a tough year. At the end-of-year management conference in Antwerp in December 1997, we wanted to *reconnect* with who we are and who we want to be and to the best in us. In the morning, in a church-like building, we first discussed business. I encouraged and gave credit to those who deserved it. But it is also my role to say when things are not going well, even my own performance. I was tough and told it straight.

After lunch, we viewed a clip from the movie *Abyss* in which the main characters have to choose who will survive the swim from a leaking sub to a ship. The man, who is the better swimmer, gets the only oxygen mask. He has to drown his wife, although the water is so cold that she has a slim chance to survive. Once on the ship, she is declared clinically dead, but he does not give up until they revive her. After this emotional scene, board members were crying. I began by asking, "Do you feel that there is more in you than just brains? That you also have emotions?" I told them that I had had a lousy year, both in business and personally. For the first time, I had been unable to bring a real team together, which frustrated me and kept me off balance. I apologized because I had not delivered what I should have as a business leader. Then I told them that if they wanted to grow, they had to connect with each other and with themselves. We began to discuss emotions. The effect was tangible. I had hit a nerve, appealed to what everyone wanted, and unlocked the energy for growth.

Where did it go from there?
A few months later, we shared our personal and business stories in a management team-building session. People first spent 45 minutes writing their life stories. What have been major factors in your life? What do you stand for? What do you want to achieve? When we shared the stories, the first manager who really opened up was responsible for a plant. He was a very respected person who had been on the board for eight years and played an important role in the transformation. He cried and talked about what he had been through. This set the scene for me. I was the last to speak, and I broke down too. We were open, honest, and real with each other.

Afterward, my coach Laura was furious, "There was a guy sitting there crying, and you could not even put your arms around him!" I was shocked and I realized how poor we were because we could not express our emotions or our empathy.

That all changed on our trip to the Ardennes. In the cellar of a ruin, I presented my emotional life story. It was not easy. I was in a little space in front of 200 team leaders, talking about the death of my father, an abusive family, and the ups and downs of my adolescence. The silence became tangible. You touch people's hearts when you talk openly about your emotions. I will never forget that a young woman in finance was angry that I had not told my story sooner. There was an implicit message: "We would have forgiven you, if we could have understood you." In that cellar, everyone created their own emotional life story and shared it in groups of two or three. The purpose of this in business is to help others know you and explain why you behave in certain ways.

How does this link to the transformation?
The logic was simple: we needed to grow the business. For the business to grow, we needed creativity and diversity. And people had to take initiative and responsibility, which require an open, respectful, and trustworthy environment. But that wasn't enough.

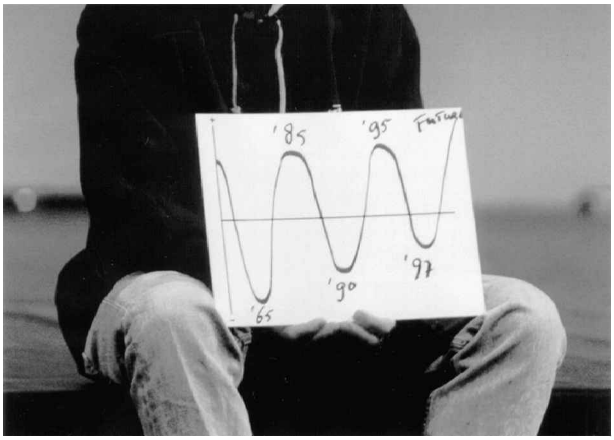
People can write a value statement saying that they will be honest, open, and respect each other. I had done that before, and it does not work. To get real openness and respect, you have to become open yourself and, therefore, vulnerable. If you want growth, you need an open, respectful culture. It took us a while to make the link between opening the emotional side and growing the business.

Another turning point came when the management team held a fishbowl discussion in front of the 200 team leaders. When I angered one of my managers, the team jumped on me. I apologized. People came out saying, "These guys are prepared to expose themselves." That was the "miracle" that we needed.

What do you mean by a miracle?

You can never create miracles. But you can create an environment that is inspirational, where it is safe to try things, where you can start to inquire. You can do that by design. At every team-leader event, at every learning conference, we try to create space for that miracle. At Ardennes, we used the emotional life stories and the management team's fishbowl discussion. Vulnerability is powerful. All the units became connected; there was a different tone.

Right after the Ardennes event, the management team had lunch together. I knew the learning conference for the whole company was coming up, so I asked them, "Are we prepared to do this with 1,800 people? Which of you will do this? I'll be telling my life story first." One said yes; then three others. Two management team members agreed to tell their life stories; two others would do masks [to share what is behind the masks they wear at work]. We would demonstrate that we are serious about openness.



Time line

Two weeks later, 1,800 people came together in a big theater. I did not start with my usual song-and-dance presentation about the figures. Instead I sat on the stage and said, "Before we begin, I'd like you to tell you a bit more about me." I cannot recall whether I told the story very well, but I was tense. Later, when I did my normal presentation, I couldn't do it. By then, I was too emotional to tell a rational story. I had a two-hour fight with myself to "get connected with the audience," and I could not.

After a break, the two plant managers told their stories. One described his early childhood during WWII; he never saw his father until after the war because his father had been arrested as a collaborator. From that day, his life changed. In disgrace, he had to change schools; the family had to keep the curtains in the house drawn. His father was eventually acquitted, but the damage was done. He also told of how he had been working with someone who had cheated and stabbed him in the back. He combined these two events to explain how his trust had been broken. Only then did I realize why this guy was so independent in his work. He rejected interdependency purely because of his childhood and his career experience. He broke down on stage, and the effect was profound. People thought they knew this man, and realizing they did not, they felt guilty.

Then the other plant manager talked about going to a Belgium boarding school, which, he explained, was not just for rich kids, but also for young criminal kids. He described how he was beaten up every day. He had resolved that he never was going to be beaten again.

Next were the two managers who demonstrated their masks. One was an Englishman who, even in the exercise, did not really show himself, but became very emotional about his relationship with his wife, showing everyone her picture. At last, we saw his human side. Then the finance director, not the most open character, described his attachment to his family.

At that point, the 1,800 people went to work on their own emotional life stories. I will never forget the silence. Normally, there would be enormous noise with that many people working, but it was quiet. People were drawing and concentrating. I could not believe the intensity with which they approached this task.

After the learning conference, this company became more open. People realized that the management team was human. I had told them that I alone could not grow this business. I could help, bring strategy, and be a coach, but they could not expect me to grow this business. I told them, "You can do it; just be yourself." And that is what we did.

contend that the performativity itself was transformative; Gunning and his team transformed through their performance. Their warehouse theatrics, akin to the first act of the drama, are a harbinger of the further transformation—of themselves and their business.

The skating performance is a different kind of theater in which the performance is largely unscripted and the audience drives the show. Consider the elements of improvisation: the orange hats, for example, came from the chairman, who had no plans for how to use them. The idea to link them to skating was a leap of imagination and wholly dependent on cooperative weather (freeze-overs do not happen every year). Staff members had only the vaguest idea where to gather and how to get their countrymen into costume. It's likely that few of the skaters—who, by turns, were audience and actors—appreciated at the moment how their costuming, vigor, and color choreography added branding to the spectacle. Interestingly, the staff's dash into frigid waters, imagined as a cast party, turned into a social performance itself. Their costuming, or lack thereof, made the experience even more memorable.

Anthropologists have documented rites of passage that punctuate change in many cultures . . .

A serious scholar might develop the symmetry between the two scenes: the symbolic death of the old culture in the food burial pit and the subsequent rebirth of a new culture through baptism in the sea. No doubt this rite of passage afforded a deep, if subliminal, meaning to the occasion. But consider two other aspects of the experience. First, the performance was a one-time event. Its uniqueness and singularity, coupled with widespread media coverage, made the experience even more memorable. Second, the performance was successful because people played. In a mix of improvisation and street theater, the staff had fun chasing after skaters, surprising them with hats, getting them into the act, and then watching the swathe of orange hats gliding against white snow. To what degree did the instinctually appealing aspects of play and interplay, with laughter and hilarity, make this event a transformative experience for employees and consumers alike?

By comparison, the meeting in the monastery was a far different kind of show. When Gunning effected the merger of Unox into VdBN, he analyzed problems and opportunities, developed a vision of growth, and then launched successful new products into the marketplace, all the right moves. But something was missing. Managers meeting in late 1997 agreed that, although business was improving, the company lacked "heart." What emerged was top managers' aspiration to reconnect deeply—intellectually and emotionally—to each other and to customers.

In early 1998, aided by Laura Tan, his adviser (or dramaturg in theater terms), and a team from the Foundation for Community Encouragement, Gunning led the retreat into the Ardennes forest for 200 leaders from every level. In addition to sharing emotional life stories, the leaders bicycled and camped together, met for fishbowl-type discussions (the top team in the center, observed by all), and joined for both quiet reflection and boisterous revelry. Subsequently, at a companywide learning conference, all 1,800 employees prepared emotional life stories and talked about themselves and their work.

Two aspects of the Ardennes performance are significant. First, Gunning and his top team had to be role models for the staff (actors) and put on the show (producers). A complex script with complicated staging, set designs, and logistics lay behind this performance. In pulling it all together, top managers demonstrated their own teamwork and reconnection to the leaders of their business. (See the sidebar interview with Gunning for his view of the drama as both director and actor.)

Second, the experience moved everyone into what anthropologists call "deep play," wherein fundamental ideas and cultural codes are open to inspection (Geertz, 1973). Whereas the skating experience was primarily "fun," the Ardennes retreat and subsequent all-staff learning conference enabled people to "play" with their culture. In reflective conversations—very much part of the performance—they talked about their frustrations, skepticism about change, and difficulties of truly connecting as people. They in turn made a commitment to be authentic with each other, to listen deeply, and to deal with difficult business issues. In this respect, the performance was an occasion for cultural reflexivity. In playing their parts, the employees were developing new cultural mores. One attendee summed up: "For me, the experience represented a major turnaround. . . . The way leaders and then all the people of Van den Bergh showed something personal about themselves. The example

Table 1 Process and performance distinctions

Process	*Performance*
Plan	Script
Steps	Scenes
Staff	Cast
Do	Act
Manager	Director
Deliver	Delight

showed that I am more than just a 'working' person in the company. The 'whole' person is welcomed."

Process versus Performance

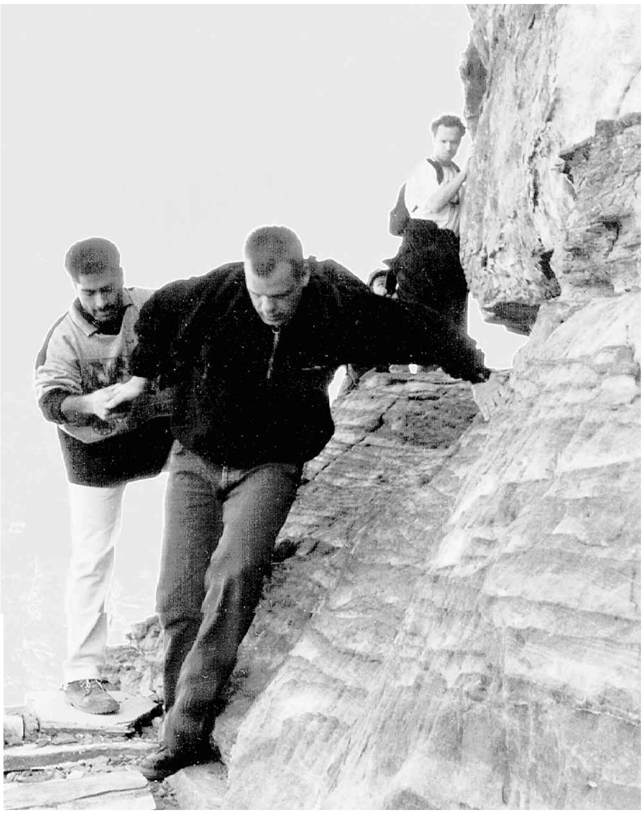
The idea that leadership, management, customer service, and, indeed, almost any work can be understood as a performing art has intellectual merit for scholars and decided appeal to many practitioners (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). There are several outstanding comparisons between the elements of organizational and theatric performance. Consider some of the following *process versus performance* distinctions (see the table).

Plan versus Script

Processes are based on plans. Mission statements, the goals they express, and the activities needed to achieve them describe what has to be done and the steps for doing it. Although the inputs, throughputs, and outputs differ in, say, strategic, financial, and operational plans, what they specify in toto is *what* has to happen to get the job done right. Scripts serve this function in performances. But the script goes deeper and further by elaborating and detailing *how* things should be done. One could quibble about the *what-how* distinction by referencing the tactical plans, instructions, and performance requirements through which plans are elaborated, activities specified, and controls designed. Instead, think of it as a matter of shading and intention. Consider the highest compliments that are given to a plan: a good plan is logical, sensible, sound. While a script conveys a plan, it also addresses the expression of emotion, suggests how to bring activity to life, and reminds us that "art" is to be performed. That's what makes a good script beautiful.

Steps versus Scenes

In process steps versus performance scenes, we find the same relative emphasis on *what* versus *how*. Both dictate sequence, flow, and timing. Attention to the scene also stresses the emotive aspects of action and aims at the experience of being there. One could argue that precisely because the warehouse awakening was staged, it had such a powerful impact. Compare these employee reactions to the informative and performative aspects of the warehouse event and to its impact as a meeting rather than an experience.



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Informative:
At the warehouse, we were told what we were doing was not right. We got more information. We got to see the numbers. There were quality problems. That was a shock for me because the people did their best and they were never told. This factory is our bread. If it goes bad with the factory, it goes bad for us.

Performative:
The whole thing was definitely masterminded. The structure of the event was to introduce the strategic situation in a very graphic and powerful way. Exultant music. Piles of products. The stamp 'reject.' Oh God! This is a warehouse full of reject product!

Staff versus Cast

Working and acting join in the "roles" people assume on the job and on stage. Indeed, the organizational use of the term borrows from theater precisely to put work into a performance context and communicate fully its performative standards. Still, there is a different social significance to being a member of a "cast," rather than part of the staff. For instance, the work of the actor getting into character, with the attendant imagining, rehearsing, costuming, makeup, and so on asks more of people than, say, standard job descriptions and demands more presence than simply showing up. In turn, actors often feel strong loyalty for their performances and their own artistry. This is akin to staff having a professional rather than organizational identity and is a mixed blessing for managers: self-styled impresarios sometimes value their own performance far more than the sucess of the show.

. . . because actors are playing and the experience is "make believe," they can reflect from a distance and . . . learn something about their art and themselves.

Working as a cast involves teamwork and like any high performing team, a theater troupe has inescapable interdependencies and everyone has to play their part for the show to succeed. But, more so than most teams, theatrical performers have to rehearse their work, and collective performance is so valued that everyone involved gets listed in the credits. Being seen as a cast is also distinctive. Show business has an undeniable cachet. Recognizing this, top entertainment, dining, and transportation companies—Disney, Hard Rock Cafe, and Southwest Airlines among them—have dramatized their customer service and staged it.

Do versus Act

While *do* and *act* seem synonymous, acting, as performativity, has some distinguishing features. The creation of an alternative reality through play frees imagination, generates energy, and opens possibilities for new directions. In turn, precisely because actors are playing and the experience is "make believe," they can reflect from a distance and, in so doing, learn something about their art and themselves. Certainly, the use of role play in management training and of psychodramas in clinical settings is based on these assumptions.

Acting out new behavior can have an impact on individuals and companies that extends beyond any particular performance. Consider the experience (and its limitations) through the eyes of two Dutch managers:

> For a couple of days, you're in a completely different surrounding. Flying in an airplane, biking, and canoeing is something you don't do every day. You're more or less lost, so all the experiences have an impact on you as a person and on your work with your colleagues.

> Today I would describe the company culture as playful. Playful, loose, creative . . . changing directions. Playing is good; you are open to new possibilities. What is lacking is a clear purpose. What's the next thing we have to do? We have to start moving in a direction, and I don't see that movement.

Manager versus Director

We do not need to repeat the countless tracts telling managers to orchestrate, choreograph, coach, and in other ways add to the artistry of organizational performance. But managers cum directors can benefit from artistic sensibilities and skills. They have the authority and responsibility to ensure the integrity of a performance—its narrative, presentation, and flow. They should also have an eye for symbolism and ear for what sounds flat. Gunning has remarked:

> There is the managing of intangibles. And it is the integration of these intangibles that makes the difference. I can work on people's emotions; I can work on people's intellect. But in the end, I want to integrate this at continuous, higher levels. So the cumulative effect of events, of walking your talk, of being consistent in your beliefs is integration at a higher level.

Deliver versus Delight

The distinction between the sought-after end of process versus performance is admittedly arbitrary. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in process management to focus so much on concrete, measurable deliverables that creativity and fun are simply driven from the process. In the service of efficiency and to gain predictability and control, processes become compartmentalized, routinized, and lifeless. In many instances, processes are equated with bureaucracy, so to put an idea "through a process" is akin to slowly killing it.

Performances, by comparison, aim to delight in their delivery, reinforcing the aesthetic agenda and reminding us of the life-giving power of art. Of course, there are many mass-produced performances and many creative ones that prove mediocre or miss their mark. The performances that we have discussed here tried to embody and promote aspirations for change. These deliverables and their delivery necessarily include the intangibles that Gunning mentioned and artistry in the overall production.

Context contributes to the success of performance. In studies of performance, the social drama of life and the aesthetic drama of performance are depicted in a figure eight, with each either contributing to or detracting from the other. A Dutch employee and cast member spoke about the all-staff learning conference:

> The learning conference is not just an event in itself. With no continuity, with no team building, we would not have results. We are one small company in Delft, but we are working with 1,800 people. We talked about ourselves in business, about the power we had in our own hands. People spoke about their own practice, not from the book, but from their experience. For me, that is gold.

Performing and Learning

Marking progress and creating change in organizations via events is still a new idea. Despite managers' and scholars' budding interest in performativity, there is not much wisdom or tested practice on staging performances that simultaneously inform, stimulate, and develop individual and collective capabilities. The performances we've described here shared certain design characteristics:

- Leaders performed actively and visibly with staff members by legitimizing theatrics and role modeling.
- Experiences were staged to engage individuals and groups. The rationale was to build capacity from the bottom up and stimulate change from the inside out. The performances also worked from the top down, and energy and direction came from the outside.
- Each scene engaged multiple senses, and sequences employed multiple media. The leader retreats and all-staff learning conferences were "happenings."
- Each event appealed to the head and the heart. In terms of performance and its aesthetic impact, the twin criteria for judging success were whether the experience was intellectually convincing and emotionally appealing.

Our history validated that the warehouse wake-up call, orange-hat skating promotion, team leaders' gathering in the Ardennes, and the learning history effort in Jordan more than met these criteria.

Part II. Making History in the Desert of Jordan

Karen Ayas

Passing the Torch

I catch myself weeping along with many others. His voice muffled by tears, I barely hear him say, "That's it; I am gone now." We are in Ed Deir—a Nabataean monastery built into an immense cliff face in Petra, Jordan. This is the final scene of the drama, which is at its peak. He continues, "I am leaving. You can do it. But you have to reinvent yourselves."

After four days in the desert in Wadi Rum, reflecting on the past five years they have worked together, 200 leaders of the business are gathered to say goodbye to their leader, Tex Gunning. I did not know most of them five days ago, and now I feel as one of them. I celebrated their successes, I witnessed their breakthroughs, and now I share their pain.

The setting and staging is perfect for this grand finale. Gunning and his "tribe leaders" (six business unit leaders) are in a small, elevated chamber, the tribe leaders standing in a semicircle behind Gunning, facing the audience. The little light penetrating the monastery is projected onto them. The acoustics allow us to hear every breath. Gunning steps down after what seems like endless applause, passing the torch to his successor, the new chairman. The two keep hugging each other, through tears and cheers.

This was not in the script, I think to myself. And I am not sure that there ever was a script. There was absolutely no way to predict how this scene would play out. Until the last minute, we were not even sure that the new chairman would be there. But there is no question that the scene had been carefully staged. Many hours had gone into the meticulous design of this event, seeking to create, scene by scene, just the right setting and circumstances. Gunning is both the producer and lead actor. All the participants created the performance and didn't know the script. They played their parts, and the actions unfolded.

Once I manage to detach myself from the effects of the drama, I am filled with awe and delight. I feel relieved that it has ended, far better than I could have imagined. Given the complicated logistics, the multitude of actors, and the lack of coordination, so many things could have gone wrong.

The Event

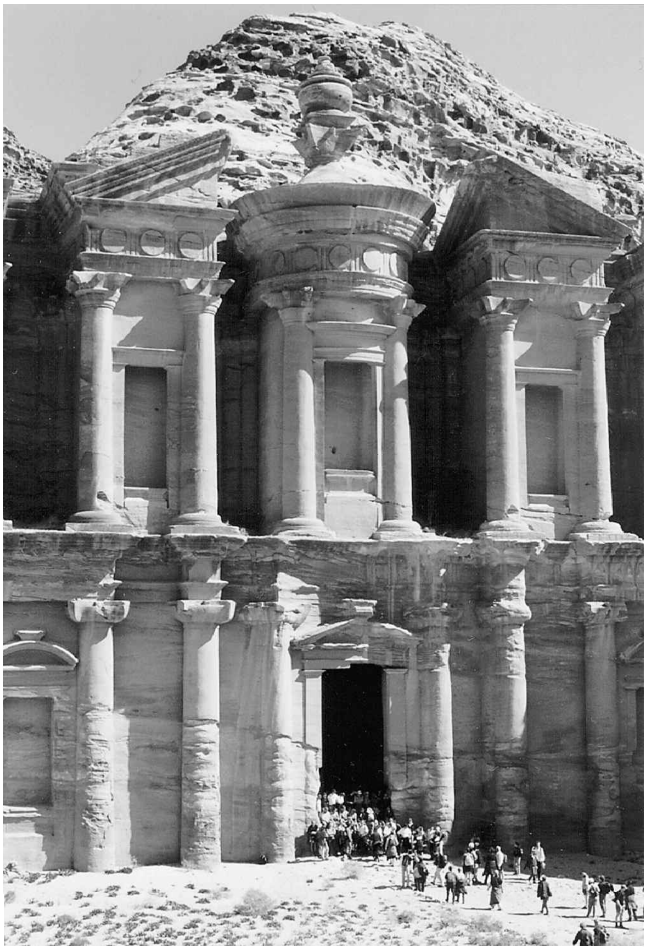
Day 1. We welcome the 200 leaders to Jerusalem. Gunning sets the stage by addressing the question of why we are here. After a half-day experiencing Jerusalem, we head south. We stop for a swim in the Dead Sea and then continue on until we reach the Jordanian border. Once we cross the border, the tribes (business units) separate into different campsites. After a two-hour, bumpy jeep ride in the dark, we end at a Bedouin campsite in the desert. Tents are set up; there is food and a campfire. It is a beautiful night. The first day has been all about getting there, both physically and emotionally. We are all exhausted and go to sleep.

Day 2. We wake to the sounds of camels. We are in the middle of an immense desert of pink sand and multicolored rocks. We leave on an hour's camel ride. Camels are the most relaxed animals: as they eat, they walk. They seem to be in tune with the majestic scenery. As we continue our ride, other groups of camels appear on the horizon, each coming from a different direction. We dismount and form a big circle; the tribes are called on to unite for their new mission. We have started a long "process" day, mostly engaged in reflective conversations while perched on rocks.

We spend the morning on visioning and the afternoon in deep discussion of what had been significant during the past five years. In preparation for the event, team leaders had been asked to reflect on their individual history, major breakthroughs, and significant moments. Now, as a unit, they construct their learning history. At the end of the day, we share everything around a huge fire. We form a big circle with each tribe holding banners documenting their most significant learnings. We return in pairs to our campsites in the dark, sharing personal visions. Conversations about business and personal stories continue into the night.

Day 3. We spend a whole day riding in jeeps on bumpy roads. Each time we stop, we switch jeeps and continue to share learnings from the previous day. The last stretch of the ride is spectacular and dangerous, with increasingly challenging curves and narrow roads atop cliffs. Just as it gets dark, we reach our campsite, all tribes now united at one site. The community feeling is enhanced by a huge campfire in the middle and caves surrounding us.

Day 4. We leave the campsite early on a five-hour hike to Petra. This scenic trail has many dangerous passages leading to the monastery on top of the mountain. All ascend for the final scene: the passing of the torch. We spend two hours visiting Petra and then check into a hotel and celebrate until 3 AM.


© Karen Ayas

The "Miracle"

In one of the many meetings in preparation for this event, I recall Gunning saying:

> We need this emergent thing—continuous feeling and sensing and changing plans accordingly. Keeping in touch with what is happening moment by moment. Because that is when miracles happen. Everything is interrelated and needs to follow a particular sequence. If one misses out on one tiny little decision, it may all fall apart.

In this event, the magic, or the "miracle" as Gunning refers to it, is twofold:

1. In producing change—the mix of planning and improvisation that leads to timely action, allowing the desired change to unfold.
2. In performing change—the intensity and profoundness of engagement in the change process, as individuals and as a community.

Only a few had been involved in the initial production of this learning performance. Aside from the external facilitators and the outdoor event organizers, no one knew where the group was going. In preparation, Gunning met with the tribe leaders, who in turn were responsible for preparing the leaders of their respective units. The tribe leaders were briefed about the logistics only after they arrived in Jerusalem, but still didn't know where they would be spending the next four days.

A group of about 20, including tribe leaders and internal and external facilitators, spent a half-day in Jerusalem to prepare for the event before all the team leaders arrived. Gunning used about half the time to communicate clearly his vision for revolutionary growth and his message—the need for them to reinvent themselves as individuals and as a business if they were to survive in the new economy. Little guidance was provided in terms of the process. Little time was spent on clarifying roles. No debriefing time among facilitators of the different units was included.

There could have been chaos, with people not knowing where they were going physically or what was next in the process, or with tribe leaders and facilitators trying to follow a changing program. Yet people played their roles impeccably, each leader producing part of the script in the performance. Though uncoordinated, all actions and interventions happened in a timely fashion, and things fell into place with a little nudge here and there, in synchronicity.

The underlying lack of control increased the sense of drama and created circumstances that brought people even closer. People were not preoccupied with the logistics; they were living every scene, moment by moment. They were in this together, but not because they felt helpless or feared what would happen next.

The design of the event and the staging were constrained by the logistical requirements. There were some process steps that didn't make sense. The jeep rides, for instance, were terrible conditions for conducting highly personal, significant conversations, yet, they worked beautifully. Some of the major breakthroughs came during lunch break. Every tribe gathered on its own, doing whatever was needed.

Observations

Of the 200 leaders, only one had been to Petra before and a few to Israel. Roughly half work in factories. Most live in Oss, a small town in the south of Holland. Some had never been on an airplane. For many of them, this could have been just an incredible trip. But all they saw was Jerusalem for two hours and Petra for two hours. The rest of the time they worked, engaging in yet one more important conversation.

After arriving at a campfire following eight hours of riding in jeeps and three days of hard work, there might have been a big party. Instead, people chose to resume their work. Even after the grand finale, when they were told it was time to stop, some groups decided to continue their dialogues.

The group's energy was nearly palpable. They were engaged both emotionally and intellectually in shaping their future, helping each other in the process. In a few days, leaders from six different units became one big family. They spent hours listening to each others' stories, learning from each others' successes and failures, and sharing their personal visions. Perspectives shifted; many conflicts were resolved.

Interpretations

I base my observations on what I saw and felt at the moment. It is possible to question to what extent an organization can really be transformed or how much magic remains. Still, much was achieved in a few days, and the use of sacred space appeared to be instrumental.

I cannot overstate the compelling nature of the desert. Wadi Rum is a majestic place where I immediately felt in harmony with the universe. My frame of reference shifted: there was something much bigger than I was, and I felt part of it. Engaging in dialogue and addressing business issues in such a space of grace opens new possibilities. People can think with their hearts and souls, where they can be emotional and not be constrained by intellect.

Such an event engages people on a path to personal growth and aligns individual and business goals. The setting opens possibilities not only for the business but also for the individual, resulting in many new insights and revelations. Since these personal breakthroughs occur in a business event, among colleagues, bringing your whole self to the work gets easier. Sharing your deepest fears and aspirations builds a strong basis for trust and a community of commitment. Working on personal vision in the context of the business creates the inevitable connection and interdependency between personal and business breakthroughs.

These events were staged to create intellectually convincing and emotionally appealing experiences.

The Bigger Picture

VdBN has had other miraculous events. During the past five years, the company has used large-scale events to launch, develop, or deepen the transformation process. These events were staged to create intellectually convincing and emotionally appealing experiences. Such memorable events have developed learning capabilities at the individual, group, and collective levels and accelerated the transformation.

Reflecting on the role and impact of the events, Gunning says:

> I always see three major things in these events. One, you bring the people to a certain space so that you can approach them emotionally. You cannot do this in the office. Therefore, you start to integrate intellect and emotion.
>
> Second, you benefit from the dynamics of large groups, so you can move faster. In an organization, you can work on transformation one by one or team by team, but that is not fast enough. And by bringing the cynics and skeptics into these events, in four days, they begin to move with the large group. Everyone becomes connected to the transformation.
>
> Third is the gift issue. If you do it properly, people accept the events as a gift or a reward of sorts—the travel, the experience, and the investment in personal growth.

Both the production (script and staging) and the performance (acting) of these events are an artful practice; it cannot be reduced to a few principles. There is no blueprint for reproducing it. As in any performance, much depends on the producers and actors, with no guarantee that the performance will give the audience what it needs or that the event will create the desired progress.

Eric-Jan de Rooij, organizer of outdoor events, comments:

> When you have these events, you go into them with a certain mindset of what you want to get. And you never get exactly what you want. You can provide the space for people to open up. You can direct, follow the energy, and feel the breakpoint. Such an event is like a magnifying glass. You can really see where your company is, and people can see each other. With such transparency, you can easily define the next steps. But strong leadership is the key to the success of the event and to what happens afterward.

My own conclusion is that while we may never discover the secret to a successful event, it is the practice that makes the difference. In the acting, people change. Each performance may not be better, but with each performance, people change for the better.

Part III. Design for Learning

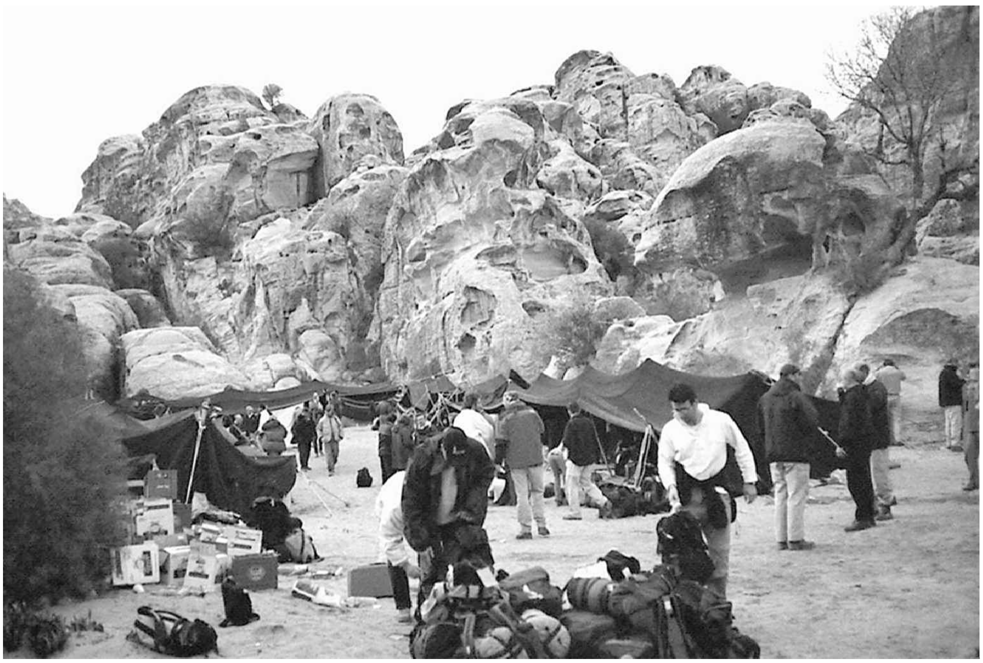
George L. Roth

Learning from experience is something that every individual does naturally. We think and act to achieve our goals, and then rethink, react, and regroup when we find that our efforts have been unsuccessful. But as individuals, we aren't perfect learners. Many factors of which we are not aware affect our performance. We aren't always thorough or systematic about connecting objectives, actions, and outcomes so that we can test and refine our understanding of how things work. And our drives to make the world more understandable often lead us to develop simple rules of thumb for complex situations. For these reasons, there is increased interest in how we can learn *collectively,* hence, the interest in organizational learning.

Research into organizational learning has focused on describing, developing, and testing conditions that support collective learning. One such effort, developed initially to capture and diffuse what can be learned from managing change, involves learning histories. In developing a learning history, people work together to assess and learn from actions and results. The process of assessing and learning together produces a "jointly told tale" about significant events (Roth and Kleiner, 2000; Kleiner and Roth, 2000). The resulting document presents retrospective accounts of people's key experiences, in their own words. The stories come from those who initiated, implemented, participated in, and were affected by the effort. We edit and weave together quotes to produce an account from different perspectives. We pay attention to literary standards in telling powerful stories. The metaphor we evoke is that of the campfire story, as if everyone were sitting around the campfire telling his or her version, respectfully breaking in or building on the previous speaker.

The process of assessing and learning together produces a "jointly told tale" about significant events.

The document becomes an artifact from which new groups can discuss what happened, why, and how it applies to them and their actions. As people read, discuss, and reflect on the work of others, learning historians try to recreate an experience from which they learn. The experience itself is a learning intervention—in its telling through interviews, production by an inside-outside team of historians, and validation through quote checking, and in its reception in reading and discussion sessions.



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What makes the learning history of VdBN unique is the effort to integrate it directly into the transformation of the business. It was very much part of a "performance" involving Gunning and his team leaders. Indeed, the first stage of the history-writing process, begun in Jordan, compared lessons from the past about growth and change to aspirations for continued transformation and future growth. It was designed to produce creative tension between current achievements and what could be accomplished with further breakthroughs in business understanding and collective resolve.

The first day included a visit to the old city of Jerusalem, a place of overt, palpable historic significance. During the event, people passed Mesada (which the Jews defended against King Herod), and the caves in Qumran (where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found). We met in Wadi Rum (where Lawrence of Arabia gathered Bedouin tribes) and climbed a mountain to descend into the Nabataean civilization of Petra (where sandstone cliffs are etched with the facades of the architectural styles of Egypt, Greece, and Rome). Western civilization has been shaped by the history that comes from these places. The choice of these learning locales was not accidental, but made one question—how history shapes us—real and immediate.

In preparation for the Jordan event, team leaders reflected on their personal history with VdBN through a time line. In Jordan, after team leaders worked on their units' history, they presented their thoughts on banners to each other. Everyone could hear how the past affected different parts of the organization. In turn, visions of a collective future were set in the context of others' experiences. Later, as the team leaders took their learning back to the organization, they compared the "lessons learned" with their staff's personal lessons about change. They presented the team stories to others at the learning conference and included them in the history book that each team created. The books covered each team's history, vision for the future, and lessons from the past on which they wanted to build.

Even as people in VdBN created their own history books for learning, a small team of insiders and outsiders followed the more typical learning history process of collecting data through interviews with individuals and groups. This learning history effort is aimed at the outside world, including audiences within other parts of Unilever. We expect that managers will find reflection on the use of performances in transformation interesting and challenging. We encourage them to design a learning performance, wherein the making of a learning history is itself a history-making event.

Part IV. Final Reflections

At VdBN, we helped to create a learning history about two transformations that had unusual features and compelling results. To the extent that the methodology differed from the standard format (which is itself still novel and experimental), it is appropriate to close with some thoughts about the change process, the research effort, and their commingling as performances.

First, the best practices identified by the learning history, both soft and hard, are familiar to academics and experienced change managers. Indeed, discussions of them produced a lot of head nodding among team leaders in Jordan and at the 2000 VdBN learning conference. This indicates how the company's team leaders have learned about change over the years. Yet systematically identifying key transformational events, documenting the actions, distilling conceptual themes, and deriving lessons added rigor to their understanding about change management on site and weight to conclusions about its impact on people and the business.

Our emphasis on the artful combination of practices, or "holistic integration," as key to success is no doubt agreeable to most scholars and appreciated by managers. But the research yielded no "models" on holistic practice per se. How artful actions connect causally to changes in people's attitudes, behaviors, and business results is, at best, speculative. In the same way, it is foolish to assume that the practices documented can be applied in a "cookbook" fashion. As Gunning remarked, "I have tried the cookbook. It doesn't work."

As for the significance of the performative events, the jury is out and must remain so. Certainly, the notion that organizational change follows nonlinear, reciprocally causal, and unpredictable directions is not new. Nor is the idea that to understand and appreciate such

patterns, we might turn to nontraditional forms of assessment, such as storytelling, video documentary, and performance art (Michael and Mirvis, 1977; Mirvis, 1980). In viewing VdBN's transformation as a series of "performances," we suggest that it be judged partly in *aesthetic* terms. It unfolded through different acts, sets, and scenes. The improvised script built on prior events, dramatized current situations, and set the stage, figuratively and practically, for what happened next. The methods and criteria of literary and theatrical critics, and of the performing art scholarship more generally, would provide a rigorous if subjective means for gauging the transformation of VdBN in its aesthetic dimensions.

When we assess this transformation as an art form that has engaged and changed a community of people, however, it seems less appropriate to use these tools or to tease out the key performative elements that made it work. When looking at a painting, we can attend to details such as brush strokes, lighting, colors, and shapes, or focus on the arrangement of the canvas and its framing, but in the end, what matters is how the painting strikes the viewer. In his commentary on the validity of art, Polanyi observed that its "truth" lay in the *experience* it creates for those who see the artwork or, in this case, participate in the performance (Polyani, Prosch, and Prosch, 1977).

The learning history was both part of and contributor to the transformation of VdBN. When performing, actors tend to take on and become their roles and, with artistic license, dramatize and orient themselves for effect. Certainly, we as researchers had this concern when we heard rapturous accounts of the Ardennes event or watched evocative videos of other meaningful events in the company's transformational time line. We would "check" for bias by probing people's positive experiences at events and challenging them to show demonstrable results of their impact. At the same time, the goal of helping people look inward, backward, and forward to learn from experience is one with which we identified and tried to bring about. Thus our probing and challenging had less to do with objectifying the experience for academic purposes and more to do with advancing the learning agenda on site.

Conflicts between action and research are commonplace and create their share of dilemmas (Mirvis, 1985). The twist here is that, in Jordan and at VdBN's learning conference, we ourselves were part of the show. We were assuming roles and performing on stage, had license to dramatize, and had effects we wanted to achieve. Clearly, this is not the norm for fieldwork, and our participation in staging a meaningful event no doubt influenced the way we see things and report on them. In that way, our experience is parallel to that of the VdBN staff and managers. We have to check our own biases in reporting what happened and what is to be learned.

Not all aspects of the performances at VdBN, including in Jordan, were intellectually, emotionally, or aesthetically compelling. There were flops. As producer and director, Gunning had his own failings, and, as he has said, his performance was not always on the mark. Of greater concern going forward is his centrality to the transformation. We wonder whether change management by performance can or even should continue at VdBN as the staff undertakes another transformation and Gunning moves on.

The extent to which his approach to change management can be generalized to other firms and leaders is questionable. In many companies, planned change processes seem rote, and the experience is grinding and ultimately defeating. Adding performativity to the change process at VdBN made it playful, meaningful, and ultimately rewarding. One indication of this approach's validity is that selected team leaders have begun to stage learning performances for their own businesses and teams. We will continue to examine whether leaders in other companies carry performativity further.

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Commentary

by Bill Torbert

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June 12, 2000, journal entry. The S-4 meeting of a dozen or so SoL (Society for Organizational Learning) consultants and researchers occurred today. S-4 represents what we need to learn in our efforts to generate the transformational alchemy of individual, team, organizational, and even societal learning that the new economy calls for. The four Ss stand for "Speed, Scale, Scope, and Sustainability."And, as Otto Scharmer has said, this formulation misses the fifth and most important S, namely, our Selves. Or, as Adam Kahane mentioned after today's meeting, he has adjusted the sixties bumper sticker, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem," to read, "If you don't realize you're part of the problem, you're certainly not part of the solution."

In a previous S-4 meeting, I had presented a case concerning my role on a major corporate board of directors when the organization achieved remarkable results, such as a merger, a spin-off, a number one ranking in its industry, $100 million losses two years in a row, the firing of the CEO, and the board-initiated resignation of the entire board. One striking learning from this experience is that all three CEOs who shared responsibility for the losses had, in their previous CEO roles, successfully generated organizational transformation and had always produced positive business results. Then all three failed in one way or another in this different environment (during a downturn for the whole industry).

Based on their past experiences, these CEOs believed that they were part of the solution and, thereby, without realizing it, became part of the problem. They invoked again the charms (or miracles! [Lichtenstein, 1997]) that they had learned would work during their previous leadership transformations. In particular, the CEO who was fired did not seem to recognize the difference between his previous situation and this one. Therefore, he tried again the recipe he had previously learned for success, rather than engaging in transformational learning again. (During his earlier success, this had been the core of his genius; he had modeled transformation by transforming himself. But, like most of us, he did not recognize the core of his own genius.)

At that same S-4 meeting, another member also presented a case. Karen Ayas had just jetted in after dancing all night in Jordan at the conclusion of an extraordinary five-day pilgrimage by some 200 members of a corporate leadership team. With eye-popping enthusiasm, she regaled us with the extraordinarily flamboyant transformational exploits and business results of Tex Gunning, the CEO of VdBN, and his leadership team. In the past three years, the CEO has configured adventures for his widening leadership team to the forest of the Ardennes, to Scotland, and to Israel and Petra.

When Gunning shared his emotional life story at the Ardennes meeting, both he and the senior team thereby modeled the significance of each leader in the company becoming a part of the solution by examining how he or she contributes to the problem. Will this transforming Dutch CEO suffer the same fate as the CEO with whom I interacted as a fellow board member? Will his successful personal and corporate transformation experience make him believe that he is now only part of the solution and blind him to the new motes he will find in his own eye in his new circumstances?

Karen Ayas presented the case again at today's S-4 meeting and brought with her a member from VdBN, George Roth, and Phil Mirvis. Karen also showed videotapes that the company uses to remind and attune the company's 2,000 members to the major events in its recent history, including footage of the meetings in the Ardennes and Jordan. These four participants told us the story from many perspectives, including the year-by-year dramatic improvement in business results. They then invited us to question them, to help them think about the key issues in this learning history, and to suggest its primary audience. Is the primary audience Tex Gunning himself, off to his new assignment in Asia? Or is it the new CEO of VdBN and the leaders reinventing the company once again? Is it VdBN's parent company that says it wants to foster an entrepreneurial culture across its more than 100 operating companies? Or is the primary audience all executives and scholars who are interested in generating organizational transformation and improved business results? Or are you and I, trying to improve our lives in organizations, whatever our current positions may be, the proper primary audience?

The company member who was with us at the S-4 meeting mentioned that Gunning is not very impressive in person; certainly, he does not appear impressive to me on the videotape. According to the company member, what is convincing about him is that he is always authentically trying to learn and deal with the current issues; this seems to be the source of his integrity. From the examples offered, some of us cited this "unimpressive" leader's evident ability to repeatedly "do the right thing at the right time," integrating immediate business issues and grandiose, symbolic, emotional gestures that shift the company's culture.

But how does one teach such ongoing authentic inquiry and timely action, when it must not replicate any past pattern, but rather reconstruct such patterns to meet the unique requirements of the present? How can we learn to reflect on the past, while increasingly "presencing" into what is going on now, and simultaneously lead toward the emerging future? How can we learn to act and inquire simultaneously, both in a timely fashion? Or, putting the same question differently, how can we learn to enact, and simultaneously to inquire about, our own innermost assumptions and our intended outermost effects?

During our "check-in" at the outset of the S-4 meeting, we had each cited our current dilemmas or victories, illustrating repeatedly that these difficult questions on how to integrate inquiry and action in the present concern our intimate relationships, our spiritual inquiry, and our whole lives even more than our work. Given today's furious pace, how can we simultaneously inquire and take timely action throughout our lives?

We must learn the secret of how to simultaneously take leadership and conduct research in ongoing real-time. Our inquiry must guide us and others into the "perpetual present" (Jaques, 1982; Scharmer, 2000)—that inclusive present, where the traces of the past meet the emerging future (Fisher, Rooke, and Torbert, 2000).

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A Lesson from the Arts

FEATURE

Robert Fritz

Much has been made lately of the role that improvisation has in our professional and organizational lives, with parallels to the tradition of jazz, a music in which improvisation is an essential ingredient. This is a very good notion, because cross-disciplines enrich us in many ways from the practical to the philosophical. But, too often, instead of truly looking to the principles of the discipline itself, we generalize and idealize the image of the discipline. The discipline becomes merely a metaphor, and the manner, rather than the substance, is studied. In the case of jazz and improvisation, we can glean many useful insights that are directly applicable to organizational life.

Robert Fritz
Composer, filmmaker, organizational consultant, and author of *The Path of Least Resistance for Managers*

Probably the most important insight is the role of composition to improvisation. This would be akin to the role of strategic planning to the role of self-organization. Does self-organization have an important place within the organization? Yes. But only in the context of an overriding, larger organizing principle. What we learn from music is that self-organization is rich when used in the right context, and exceedingly limited in the wrong context. What defines right and wrong in this regard is a function of size. The larger the organization, the more the need for formal organizing principles. The smaller the unit, the more the ability to use improvisation.

In thinking about jazz and improvisation, we can broaden our picture by including what happened to jazz in the late sixties and early seventies. This was a period in the arts when many traditional forms were radically abandoned. In theater, there was the "breaking down of the proscenium." In art, there were the "happenings" led by the likes of artist Alan Kaprow. In classical music, there were the experiments with indeterminacy of John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen. And in jazz, there was a "free jazz" movement in which the traditional forms were put aside for a kind of longer free-form composition. What we can learn from this movement is the limitations of self-organization, because, after more than a decade, most of the innovators of these freer forms rejected them in favor of the traditions they thought they had left behind.

This was an incredibly rich period in the history of the arts, somewhat akin to the great period of the twenties in which Dada was the aesthetic guiding light. But that period, like the later one, was followed by a return to stricter organizing principles, formal structures, thematic unifying concepts, and greater control of the materials. And the reason for this is simple. After all the experiments, and after the shock value wore off, the art itself became predictable and often rather boring. What the artists in the various disciplines were learning is the value of focus. Water, focused through the nozzle of a hose, has more power. Expression, focused through the compositional rigor of a form, had more power than unharnessed improvisation.

Expression, focused through the compositional rigor of a form, had more power than unharnessed improvisation.

If we look to the history of the arts, our answers about self-organization are all there. The great experiments have been conducted, and the experience stands as a bright beacon of insight. The wisdom that had emerged was that improvisation was particularly useful in the context of a larger compositional process, and less useful without such a composition.

What Managers Can Learn from Jazz

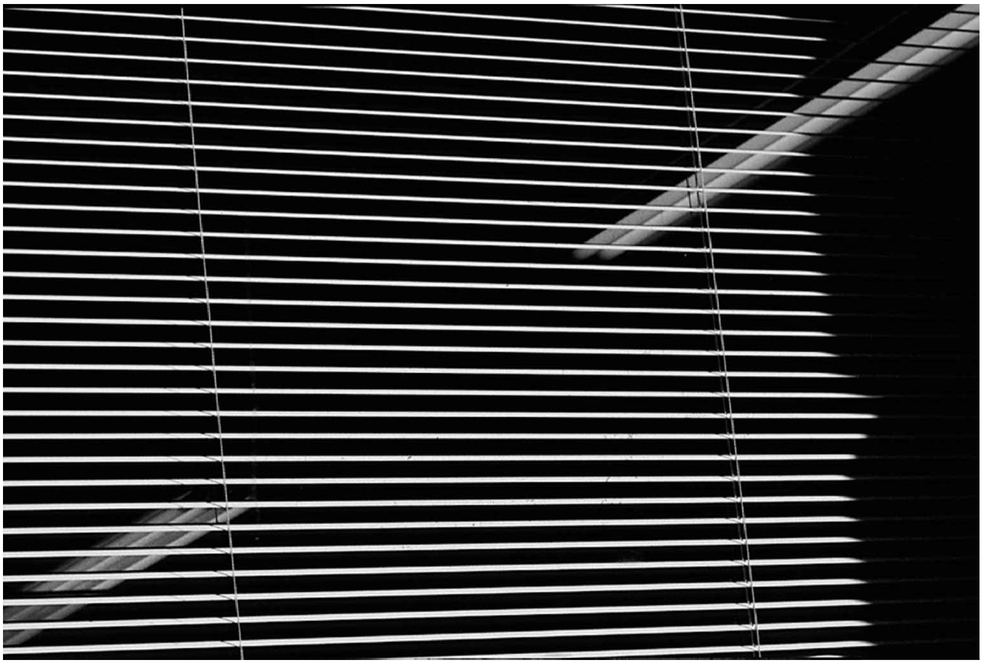
We need to remember that most jazz improvisation occurs in the context of small groups. The larger the group, the less the improvisation per capita. In a small group, the musicians may use a large degree of improvisation as a theme and variation (play the “head” and then have many solos), but this is performed within the context of song form, one of the simplest and most basic structural forms in music. The musicians are really following this very strict form harmonically, rhythmically, modally, and melodically. In a way, the script is written, and the players are then creating a kind of spontaneous performance of it.

The impression a listener may get of complexity is illusionary. There may be a lot going on, but it hardly ever gets to a point of structural complexity as does a fugue, which is a highly organized contrapuntal form.

Not that we should think that complexity in music is a right or desirable goal. Some of the simplest folk songs have profound power—think of “Amazing Grace” or “Black Is the Color of My True Love’s Hair.”

If we were to try to apply a notion of improvisation to organizations, we would need to have a very small organization indeed (a trio, a quartet, a quintet). The members of such a company would have to know their business well enough that they could spontaneously strategize, translate that into tactics, and learn to work together to deliver exceptional customer service within a compressed time frame. This type of business does exist in small coffee shops, in the service industry, in real estate offices, and in many other small businesses. But as the business grows, the need for organization and a “compositional process” grows with it.

This should be no surprise, for the history of jazz has the same pattern. Jazz emerged from the marching bands of New Orleans, which would break into spontaneous improvisation while coming back from the funeral they tended. These bands soon formed into smaller units, and Dixieland was born. There were three major soloists to this music: the clarinet, the trumpet, and the trombone, often playing simultaneously while they were accompanied by the other instruments. As the twenties became the thirties, we see the clarinet become the reed section, the trumpet become the trumpet section, and the trombone become the trombone section of the big band era. Solos became part of the larger arrangement, and the likes of Chick Webb and Fletcher Henderson became the driving forces of swing. One of the greatest American composers grew out of this tradition—Duke Ellington. While he had some of the best jazz improvisers in the world playing in his band, he used their talents within the context of his truly brilliant compositions.



As bebop emerged in the late forties, small groups came into favor once again, and here's where we see the birth of a new musical style. But this style was very clear. It had its rules and principles, and everyone learned these rules or they would be jeered off the bandstand. The form was almost always fixed. A tune, two choruses for each soloist on which to improvise, and then "trading fours," which meant that the drummer would solo for four measures and then the band would play for four measures for two more choruses.

While improvisation was key to individual expression, there arose definitive regional styles. New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, New York, West Coast, East Coast—all had recognizable styles. These styles existed because, independent of the degree of improvisation, the musicians observed strict common practices. The implication here is that, while the solos were improvised, much of the musical material was not. Style was an organizing principle that determined many of the decisions the players made.

But throughout all the years and eras, and no matter what the style, the same principle was true: the larger the band, the more the need for and use of composition, and even bebop had some famous big bands, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thad Jones. The later decades saw the Jazz Composer's Orchestra come into being.

As professionals, there is a need to learn how to use improvisation along with other skills within management. And we need to avoid the trap of glorifying improvisation as if it were the key to self-organization, and then glorify self-organization as if it were the key to organizations. When we look more closely, we find it takes composition to make improvisation work well, and the principle of scale and scope determines how much composition one needs.

Here are some points that we might want to consider:

- In organizations, self-organizing systems tend to lead to a predictable pattern of oscillation, as competing factors vie for power, authority, control, headcount, higher budgets, and more power. The reason this is so is that each unit takes on an unspoken, but assumed, goal of survival, and the parts do not support the whole, but merely attempt to accomplish longevity.
- A compositional approach to the organization does exactly what it does in music; it ties the parts to a whole. In music, this is called stylistic or thematic unity, an essential dimension in art. A piece of music couldn't make sense without it, and neither can an organization.
- In jazz, the reason improvisation can exist well in small group settings is that, within that context, the group is small enough to create spontaneous unity among the members. As I've pointed out, the larger the group, the less this unity happens without a strong compositional process and a strong leadership function to coordinate the various parts (the conductor or the band leader).

The art and discipline of music is one of the best fields for study to learn many lessons that apply directly to organizations. But we must really look to music itself, and not make it into a metaphor for it to be particularly useful. The lessons from jazz and from the art of improvisation are very useful to managers, indeed, especially when understood in the larger context of a compositional process.

VIEWS

The Arts in Practice

Stephen C. Buckley

Stephen C. Buckley
Entrepreneur, writer, and consultant

The process of incorporating aspects of the arts into business means more than simply hanging paintings in the lobbies of our corporate offices. While many such programs exist, they are really only a nod to the role of the arts and, in effect, continue the segregation that has long existed between the artistic and business worlds. The art hangs on the walls, but business continues as usual in the offices and, more importantly, in the minds of the people working in them. From a business perspective, there are potentially enormous economic gains to be realized from adopting artistic methods and practices in business. For example, we, as business people, can learn much about team work and innovation from understanding what makes a great jazz band or comedy troupe create a complete performance on stage from thin air. There is also much to be learned about how we develop and market products from how a visual artist creates "an experience" for the observer. Lastly, we can learn, or perhaps rediscover, a great deal about ourselves as human beings with an innate desire to create and contribute as part of a community, rather than as so many highly specialized cogs in some vast machine. In the following two-part article, I spoke with a corporate executive, a researcher, and a consultant to provide a few examples of how business entrepreneurs are using artistic method and practice to achieve business objectives.

Nils Fonstad
MIT Sloan School of Management

Bill Hughes
Managing Director
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The Discipline of Improvisation

Perhaps you've had the pleasure of watching an improvisational comedy troupe or hearing the musicians in a jazz band work a particular theme and carry it to new heights right in the moment, without following a script or a score. Part of the thrill is in enjoying the creativity of the performers and the surprise that comes from the fact that no one, not even the performers, really knows with any certainty what is going to happen next.

Improvisation such as this can also occur in the world of business where the need to innovate and evolve in concert is becoming increasingly important. Recently, an MIT researcher and an executive from an Internet incubator have been working to uncover what makes improvisation work effectively in Internet start-ups. Nils Fonstad is a Ph.D. candidate at the MIT Sloan School of Management who is writing his doctoral thesis on improvisation in the workplace. During the summer of 2000, he "shadowed" the non-profit Internet start-up, Secure Sponsorship, to discover how people improvise at work as a way to innovate new products. Bill Hughes is an MIT alumnus and a managing director at Cambridge Incubator, where he co-directs the Internet Product Development Group. Cambridge Incubator fosters the rapid development of Internet start-up companies. Hughes is responsible for managing the process by which fledgling Internet start-ups define and build their technologies.

Fonstad and Hughes note that, while improvisation can seem like an anything-goes, fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of experience, there is a great deal of discipline and expertise behind doing it well. As in a jazz band, improvisation may occur in the course of playing, but what keeps the improvisation from sounding like noise is the expertise of the individual musicians—how well they know how to play together and how well they understand the essence of the melody. They may be improvising, but they are all playing the same song. The same holds true in a start-up. While improvisation can happen, it needs to happen within certain parameters and with finesse to keep from sounding like noise.

Think of an initial business plan as a first draft of the score for a song. What has to happen before your band gets its first major record deal? Both Fonstad and Hughes agree that there are three major things entrepreneurs need before they can attain the start-up's equivalent of such a deal—first-round funding from venture capitalists. These three things revolve around improvising an identity for: (1) the team, (2) the business, and (3) its products.

Usually, well-established businesses already have a relatively stable business concept and established teams, so, in these situations, improvisation most often occurs around their products. But in a start-up environment, improvisation occurs not only around the creation of the product identity, but also in the team and business identities as well. Says Fonstad:

> The three critical questions that a start-up needs to tackle in determining an identity are:
>
> 1. How are we represented in a product?
> 2. How do we represent ourselves in a business plan?
> 3. Who are we as a specific team?
>
> You don't answer one of these questions and then the other two. They are circular and overlapping. It takes a while until they all mesh into something that's somewhat stable. A lot of people don't see this hurdle and its complexity. And by nature, it's a messy one.

So how does improvisation help or hinder a start-up? Fonstad and Hughes agree that in a start-up business, improvisation is a fundamental process for innovation. It cannot be haphazard or random, but rather can act as a way to reflect on your situation, make sense of that situation, and create something new. Discipline is important, as Hughes points out:

> Improvisation is riskiest at the earliest stage of a start-up, because that's where you are trying to define your fundamental identity; who you are and where you are going. What we do at Cambridge Incubator is ask the entrepreneurs questions we really care about as a way of keeping them focused.

As in jazz, you can improvise, but you still need to be playing the same song. "Incubators introduce due diligence," says Fonstad. "They question the finances, the audience, and help people who don't necessarily have that discipline. This helps insure that people are improvising around a very finite number of things."

What makes effective improvisation possible? A great deal seems to rest on the expertise of the players. Fonstad uses the example of the "elevator pitch." Say you are an entrepreneur, and you happen to get on an elevator with a key investor. You have only a few minutes to introduce yourself and explain your business and its next steps. "You have practiced the discipline of preparation, so in that moment, you are able to improvise a pitch. It really takes a lot of work and practice to improvise. Then you are able to improvise as easily as you are able to breathe. The art is in making it seem easy and effortless. Practice makes the pitch seem like a no-brainer." Hughes adds, "You have probably heard the expression that some people make their own luck. But what's really happening isn't entirely luck. What's happening is you put yourself in a position where you are ready to improvise. You are so expert that you know exactly what to do in whatever situation you are in."

[Improvisation] cannot be haphazard or random, but rather can act as a way to reflect on your situation . . .

As in a jazz band, everyone in a start-up has a part to play. "People improvise around certain specialties," says Hughes, "which can cause some companies to have problems if they don't discern what the strengths of the players are. For example, you might have someone who is really good with people, and his or her strength is in bringing the group together, and you put that person in a position of authority and responsibility. But that strength might wear off if the goal is analysis and planning. You have to let certain people play at certain times, and it's the melody that has to drive it."

Arthur Roberts
Consultant

A Conversation with Arthur Roberts

Arthur Roberts is an MIT graduate who worked in professional theater before majoring in psychology. He took a master's degree and then did postgraduate training as a Gestalt psychotherapist. He now works as a consultant to individuals, groups, and organizations.

Creativity and the origin of new ideas is a subject that remains largely a mystery. In this interview, Roberts addresses the subject of creativity and innovation as it relates to the entrepreneur.

Stephen Buckley: Why are creativity and the creative process important topics to the entrepreneur?

Arthur Roberts: That's a tough question because it seems so self-evident! Creativity is an important topic for entrepreneurs because entrepreneurs *trade* in creativity. It's what they do day in and day out, and either they're doing it skillfully and with awareness, or they're doing it blindly and leaving a lot to luck. But the point is that all entrepreneurs are creative. Even if you argue that some entrepreneurs aren't really "creative"—that they're just good leaders who put together "creative people" to implement their plans—well, that's creative work! There's a big misconception that "creative process" is something that happens in isolation. Creativity is a "field event"—it's something that happens when certain conditions in the field are met, and it doesn't happen when they're not met. It's very clear that certain things foster the flow of creativity in individuals and organizations, and certain things hinder it.

Stephen Buckley: What do you mean by the term "field" in this context?

Arthur Roberts: "Field" is an ambiguous term, but it's necessarily ambiguous, I think. It's not a term that's easily pinned down with clarity and conceptuality because it's more of an experiential term. It refers to the way we experience our "lifespace." Kurt Lewin [1999], another MIT affiliate, used the term "lifespace" in the forties, as well as promoting what he called "field theory" in the social sciences. The concept as I use it is similar to the way it's used in the physical sciences—especially physics—as it describes a flow of forces, within a region, which are interconnected in a highly responsive way. These forces influence the entire system; in some ways, they *are* the entire system. The implications of this would require a long exposition. But perhaps the most important point to mention is that there are certain leverage points, or "nodes," within any given field that, by virtue of several factors, exercise more influence than others, and these are what you want to identify.

Stephen Buckley: What is meant by the term "working at the boundary"?

Arthur Roberts: "Working at the boundary" is my term for a way of working that many people have experienced at one time or another. It means to work at the boundary between the known and the unknown, and usually induces a state of focused concentration, immersion in the moment, and creative flow—the kind of state where new ideas and actions and feelings seem to "happen" of their own accord, almost effortlessly. At the time, it does seem effortless, but it's not accidental. Creative experience like this occurs for two reasons:

1. We know precisely where to put our attention.
2. We are working in a "creative field" and are so deeply aligned with it that "it" works through "us"—we become vessels for something much wider. Almost all groundbreaking creative work proceeds along these lines.

Stephen Buckley: What are some ways that people and organizations can foster creativity?

Arthur Roberts: This is actually a specialized question. Aside from the issue of how to foster individual creativity, there is a larger kind of perspective that must take into account the wider environments within which people do creative work. Certain environments support creative work, and certain environments hinder it. As far as I can tell, there are social and environmental factors that people and companies can control, and that promote creative activity within the boundaries of those environments. As a very basic example, in some work environments, new ideas—especially new ideas from people who "aren't supposed" to be idea people—are often dismissed or ignored. But intentionally creating a social environment in which people's ideas are routinely received, explored, and entertained creates a kind of trust that lets people know that they're *allowed* to think new things. When this is done successfully, even people who "aren't creative" find themselves having valuable thoughts about the collective work that their team or organization is involved with. It sort of catches fire, and productivity and morale go through the roof.

It's a little more complicated than that, of course, but the remarkable thing is that when it's done well, you find that everyone has something to contribute. Everyone has some piece of the puzzle, some bit of information, that's important to the wider field. The things that individuals come up with in such an environment are almost invariably relevant to the overarching goals of the group, or team, or ensemble, or organization, or whatever.

. . . Creating a social environment in which people's ideas are routinely received . . . creates a . . . trust that lets people know that they're allowed *to think new things.*

Stephen Buckley: What are some of the tools, methods, or exercises that individual people can use to become more creative?

Arthur Roberts: There are a number of ways to approach it. At the individual level, simple education and coaching help tremendously. What most people don't understand at this level is that creativity doesn't come from the head; it comes from the body. We usually get stuck and frustrated when we try to *think* our way to some novel solution, or when we rely on the intellect alone to come up with some creative idea. It's like banging your head against a wall. It's very rare that anything new comes just from thinking about it. But when people discover for the first time how much information is stored in their bodies—how much the body already knows, before the mind does—it's like a revelation. The big breakthroughs almost always come when people learn to dip into their present experience—not their present *thinking*, but their present *experience*—which is unavoidably an embodied experience. People in the arts understand this. It's why you hear painters and writers and actors talk so much about "being in the moment" and working from the "heart" or from the "guts" instead of from the head. Half the battle in creative work is getting *out* of your head! But at any rate, there are many exercises and methods that help individuals learn how to become more creative in their day-to-day work.

At the group level, this question gets very interesting. Helping companies to become more creative essentially means helping them to see the dynamics that are either hindering or supporting the flow of creativity within their organizations. One powerful way to do this is setting up what is called a "field constellation." Individuals in a workshop are chosen to represent key forces or people within the sphere of the company. For example, one person may represent the president of the organization; another, the competition; someone else might stand in for the founder, the receptionist, the stock market, or whoever else is a relevant force in the company's existence. The representatives are then arranged in space relative to each other so that the resulting "constellation" of people becomes a kind of live model of the actual forces at work. From here, you can make all kinds of interventions. The information that results from this kind of work is startling. Because the forces that govern the flow of creativity in organizations are invisible to the naked eye, the field constellation is the instrument we use to amplify our powers of perception. And when we do, hidden dynamics and solutions present themselves quite plainly. It's amazing to see.

Stephen Buckley: What are some of the tools or practices we can use to make our workplaces more creative?

Arthur Roberts: When I have time, I'll have to write you a book about it!

Stephen Buckley: How does the role of the artist, or the arts, interplay with that of the entrepreneur and business? What can they learn from each other?

Arthur Roberts: Well, it's really a false dichotomy—the "businessperson" and the "artist"—especially today, with technologies like the Internet that really require new ways of doing just about everything. But there is a useful distinction between the modes of being that are traditionally ascribed to one or the other group. If you look at it that way, then "business people" and "artists" have an enormous amount to teach one another, and the domain where their interests intersect is in the area of creativity. This intersection is no coincidence, because creativity is a *human* characteristic; it doesn't belong to any path or profession. It's a natural, inherent trait. Human beings can't *not* be creative. And each type, "the business person" and the "artist," has its own characteristic ways of approaching creativity. In business, for example, there are the traditional brainstorming sessions and other such ways of freeing up creativity, while in the arts, you've generally seen more attention paid to physicality and non-verbal approaches. You need both kinds, of course. But today something very different is happening as people begin to see the connections between all these levels: between the verbal and the non-verbal, the individual and the collective. It's a very exciting time. There are unprecedented opportunities for doing trailblazing, creative work.

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On Classical Music and Business—Listening, Leading, Learning

Alf Westelius

Teamwork is becoming ever more important in organizations. Sports are often seen as inspiration and a source of metaphors for business, usually focusing on leadership, coaching, and the ways in which one individual may help enhance team performance. I spend much time playing classical music, and offer orchestras and the string quartet as additional sources of inspiration and a way to further teamwork.

Alf Westelius
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Symphony Orchestras

In Sweden, it is becoming increasingly popular to bring in conductors to lecture at leadership programs. Symphony orchestras share many similarities with hierarchic business organizations, with some marked differences. The conductor has the final say and decides on interpretation, timing, and so on. Depending on instrumental qualifications, the conductor may even suggest solutions to technical issues, such as bowing or fingering. The orchestra is a hierarchy, and within each instrumental group, the first chair decides on technical issues during rehearsals and uses movement and gestures to coordinate the playing.

The conductor metaphor is one of leadership from the leader's viewpoint. The focus is on the woman or man at the top who tries to convey an idea or vision to the members of the organization, the musicians. As a musician, I attempt to present in this article the view of being led, interpreting cues, and playing a part with other orchestra members.

Following a conductor is no more a precise science than following a business manager. Each orchestra develops its own tradition on when to play in relation to the conductor's beats—on the beat or slightly after—just as a culture may develop in a business organization on paying heed to the manager's cues. In the orchestra, hearing is far more accurate than sight for timing and other coordination issues. The conductor gives the general timing of an entry, but a combination of listening to the other instruments and watching the cues from the first chair gives the exact moment. Volume is similar: the conductor provides a general idea, which is then calibrated against the audio input from the other instruments.

Tuning also requires the constant attention to the pitch of other instruments and, in particular, to instruments playing in unison or in parallel musical figures. Each player receives sensory input from nearby players. Due to the physical grouping of the orchestra according to function—part or instrument—it becomes more difficult to coordinate with the instruments that are farther away. As in a company, coordination is achieved to a large extent by putting the middle managers—the first chairs—close to each other and in close contact with the conductor, their manager. However, in an orchestra, you have a somewhat better opportunity to develop responsiveness and communication with those playing other instruments than you have of developing your own view of the total operation in a business organization and tuning in to colleagues. The signals are there to pick up if you learn to pay attention to them.

Paying attention not only to those playing your own part but also to the conductor takes practice. The better you know your part, the more you have played in an orchestra, and the better you know the whole piece, the more you can listen to others and adjust your own playing accordingly. Each player has his or her particular sound and way of moving, behaving, and responding to cues. Instrumentalists who are experienced orchestra players can achieve acceptable coordination almost from the start, but superior performance requires extensive rehearsing with the same people. The conductor may give instructions by gesturing during a performance, but to a large extent, must explain verbally during rehearsals. These explanations are general ideas about expression and emphasis or direct instructions, such as “oboe too loud here,” “trombone slightly flat there,” “second violin behind the beat,” and so on.

Musicians expect visionary as well as detailed instructions, although status affects how they receive the instructions. They find it more acceptable to be instructed or even reprimanded by a well-known, respected conductor than by a junior or less respected one. But the power of position is insufficient for making the conductor’s word the law. There may be a degree of civil or less than civil disobedience.

However, disregarding the conductor upsets the way the orchestra functions and the mechanisms by which it works. In crises, such as when a conductor misses a beat, disobedience may save the performance, but, normally, failure to take the conductor’s cues results in inferior performance.

Performing classical music, such as a symphony, is an exposed kind of service delivery. Everyone—from the individual instrumentalist to the first chairs (the middle managers) to the conductor (the manager)—meets the “customer,” who scrutinizes and evaluates their actions and performance then and maybe publicly after. Team efforts of 100 or more people are not unusual in business, but it is rather rare that the “moment of truth” encompasses the whole team, and as transparently as it does on the stage. The way the orchestra handles a performance is through clear division of labor, strict hierarchy, detailed written instructions (sheet music), and careful rehearsal. But this is not sufficient. Above all, each member must listen attentively and be aware of what the other players are doing.

String Quartets

Turning from the large, hierarchical organization to a much smaller one, the string quartet, we find a very different form of organization. In a string quartet, interpretation, coordination, choice of music, and selection or acquisition of performance opportunities may be more or less centralized, distributed, or truly collective. However, in my experience, a string quartet tends to be a self-organizing, rather than hierarchical, organization. But first, let’s look at the quartet’s environment.

Unlike sports, where organized competition under clear rules is the norm, the string quartet operates in markets that more closely resemble enterprise markets—where success or relative lack of success may be determined by rules that are neither clear nor apparent. Just as many companies can exist side by side and find customers, string quartets exist simultaneously and find listeners without the need to show who has a gold medal and who does not. Rankings and explicit competitions exist in business and in chamber music, but they are constructions, not the primary goal of the companies or the quartets.

In theory, as well as in the media and everyday discussions, it is often assumed that profit is the primary goal in business. However, a closer look at practice reveals other logics: a striving for growth, power, self-determination, or fame; a preoccupation with challenging tasks; or the appeal of technological excellence. These may exist anywhere, but are often obvious among entrepreneurs. In chamber music, the absence of clear rules leaves room for complex interaction and freedom in setting goals and quality standards. As with entrepreneurship, the goal may be to work according to your own beliefs, while financial matters are a means to keep going, not an end.

In chamber music, the absence of clear rules leaves room for complex interaction and freedom in setting goals and quality standards.

Chamber music is not profitable, and even the professional quartets view income as a restriction, a means of sustenance rather than a goal. Having chosen to earn my living

Evening Journal Staff Photographer, 1930

in business and academia, I have found that playing music takes up a considerable amount of my time and competes with other activities, but is only occasionally remunerated. My fellow musicians are a mix of professional musicians, managers, professionals, and workers, women and men, some well off, some of humble financial means. The common denominator is an interest in chamber music.

Rehearsing and Performing

In most service companies, training to become proficient may be undertaken individually before meeting customers, but training on the team level typically occurs in front of the customer. A string quartet would find it extraordinary to perform without having first rehearsed as a group. Rehearsing affords the quartet members time to experiment, argue, and develop—something that would benefit other organizations too. The members of a string quartet spend around 90% of their time practicing individually and rehearsing together and 10% performing. In many other professions, the opposite may be the case; charging mainly for the time spent in customer contact leads to a tendency to spend little time rehearsing in private.

Quality

Quality includes obvious individual parameters, such as playing the right notes, in key, and with a good sense of rhythm. There are also team-based parameters. Four people, each playing a part in tune, may produce chords that are out of tune, either systematically because one player has a slightly different sense of pitch, or on some chords because the players do not listen attentively to each other.[1] Interpreting music involves interpreting some not very precise instructions, such as "slower" or "louder," but it also involves deviating rhythmically and dynamically from the explicit score. Most music would seem dull and uninteresting if played metronomically as written; slight attenuation and shortenings of notes "within the rhythm" give life to the performance.

When playing string quartet, the team assembles in one place in physical proximity that affords full sensory input. The members see each other's minute movements and hear what they play and say, along with their breathing and sighs. This closeness is rarely achieved in companies. There are much richer opportunities for coordinating with the viola player sitting by your elbow for half the time you spend on the quartet than for the developer to coordinate with the salesperson she rarely meets.

Having rehearsed the piece thoroughly, you are well acquainted with how you interact with your fellow players when you finally meet the audience. Because of this, you have the option of paying more attention to the audience and the "feel" or "atmosphere" in the room than you would if you had only a rough idea of what your companions will be doing. On the other hand, the interaction with the audience—the "customers"—is rather limited, and the feedback is ambiguous until you've played the final note and you hear polite or enthusiastic applause.

Rehearsing has its benefits, but so do attention, novelty, and challenge. A piece that is too well rehearsed can lose its players' interest, and it may also lull the musicians into inattentiveness because they feel that they know everything about how the others are playing. The comment, "Let's not rehearse until we are bored with the piece; let's keep some excitement," is well known to musicians. This "nerve" in the delivery is, for example, also recognizable in teaching situations, speeches, and other occasions with a degree of "stage performance." What distinguishes the quartet setting from business counterparts is the extreme degree of coordination required by the quartet and the continuous rather than sequential interface between players.

Assembling the Team

A professional quartet assembles itself, possibly initiated by one or two players, and plays together for years or decades. More temporary quartets may assemble for a single production. They too are typically organized by someone within the group rather than assigned to the team by an outside actor, such as a manager. The self-organized nature of the quartet implies that all members must consent if the quartet is to continue. In companies, self-organization of teams is sometimes possible, but more often, people are assigned to teams. And team members are usually current employees. Pulling together a quartet is more like forming a group in a virtual organization; potential members belong to the networks of the initiators or their networks' networks. Any player may form the quartet; it is not the prerogative of the cellist or the first violin.

The selection of members depends on many parameters—individual musical qualifications, social compatibility, time to rehearse, quality standards, interest in the music—but does not always focus on the most accomplished musicians. Some very good players may not want to rehearse more than a minimal amount, while someone less accomplished may be willing to spend more time rehearsing. Then it can be possible to achieve a better result by relying on those who are willing to spend more time. There are also long-term considerations, such as developing a relationship and learning to play with a particular player to open future opportunities rather than just trying to make the best choice of player for a certain concert.

The end result depends on each player's mastery of the instrument, knowledge of the music (style, composer, actual piece of music), level of experience in playing chamber music, how often the group has played together, how well they get along, each player's emotional and intellectual attitude to the piece, how the group responds to a particular audience, and how well rehearsed the group is.

Pulling together a quartet is more like forming a group in a virtual organization; potential members belong to the networks of the initiators or their networks' networks.

As in companies, people who get along and work well together tend to prefer working together when new projects arise. However, in a quartet, the match between the players goes beyond ability to work together. Because the performance involves all four players, simultaneously, all need to be on a par to create an enjoyable performance. To some extent, it is possible to choose music that poses different requirements for each player, but large differences between players severely limit the repertoire. Unlike business projects, trading tasks within the team is limited, as is the possibility of utilizing temporary participants for part of the job. The cellist cannot trade parts with the second violin for a complicated sequence, and the viola player would not engage a more accomplished musician to play the third movement with the great solo. If there is a mismatch between a player and his part, the available solutions, short of replacing the member, are to practice harder or to try to hide the problems.

There are many similarities between the string quartet that is not full-time and work or project teams. Quartets may assemble for a particular performance, just as a team may assemble for a specific project. For the quartet member, playing is one of many tasks that compete for time and attention, just as the project or team member is only rarely dedicated to that task. Even in terms of professionalism, there are differences among the capabilities and performance of quartet members and among team members. In addition, the team member's and the quartet player's role may be her or his forte or a peripheral capability or qualification.

Feelings and Emotions

In the original sense of *amateurism*,[2] music is a field where feelings are strong and sensations of "beauty," "magic," and other emotions are common and accepted. "What music; it brings tears to my eyes!" or "Isn't this truly beautiful?" are comments that do not have their counterparts in my other fields. There are darker feelings too. When first rehearsing the Second Gorecki String Quartet, I felt anguish gripping my chest forcibly and physically. The second violinist said, "You will have to find someone else to play this part. I can't endure this."

Because of emotions and feelings, choosing pieces to play is a field of negotiation. I may accept playing a piece for which I have no enthusiasm, given that we will, sooner or later, play something I prefer. But enthusiasm or the lack of it may also rub off on other members. When a respected member, having played through a piece, said, "With some music, you do the composer a disservice by performing it," it affected the other members' evaluation of the piece. On the other hand, when a member introduced a piece by saying, "This is the most marvelous piece of music; I heard it on the radio some weeks ago and immediately felt that 'I just have to get to play this,'" the other members looked for aspects to appreciate in the music too.

In business, it is the manager's job to spark subordinates' enthusiasm. In a quartet, that task is not connected to any specific player. Normally, the member who chooses or suggests the piece may have to "sell" it. This may be due partly to the selection of members on the basis of positive feelings for the piece. Once the quartet is assembled, the advocate for the music tries to start the rehearsal positively, marshaling purely emotional or intellectually emotional arguments such as, "I just love this. It is a marvelous piece of music," "It would be a feat to perform this," or "I am so curious about this; it is almost never played." If this fails, the quartet may gradually agree to change the repertoire. Obviously, love for the music played will benefit the rehearsals and the performance.

Status and Opinions

The functional roles of the players are usually set; it is obvious who plays the first violin, the second violin, the viola, and the cello. When putting the team together, players sometimes discuss which violinist will play the viola (viola players are often scarce). Unless the choice is obvious, based on differences in competence or seniority, the group may also discuss which violinist will play first violin or second violin. During the rehearsals, many decisions are made: setting quality standards, choosing repertoire, scheduling rehearsals, and deciding on interpretation and quality control. After the functional roles are set, who decides what remains open.

The first occasion for stating position and establishing team roles is when we gather for rehearsal. After some preliminary chatting while unpacking instruments and setting up chairs and music stands, we sit down. The first violinist makes the normal opening remark, "Let's start by just playing it through to get an idea of the music and to see where the difficulties lie." Given that another player has chosen the piece, he or she may advance the comment or accept or reject the suggestion.

Usually the quartet awards the first violinist the main coordinating role because the composer often confers the leading role in the music on that part. However, sometimes another instrument will give the coordinating cues. Dominance in coordination may tend to give the first violinist the lead in determining interpretational matters as well. But much authority stems from personal traits, from experience and musical accomplishment, or from personal likes or dislikes.

The First Rehearsal

When a quartet first meets, there is some tension, especially if the members have different formal titles and if their actual capabilities are unclear. If, for example, a player is a member of a well-known orchestra, while others are not, that player may strive to ascertain his status in the quartet. If there is another player with unquestioned high status, the one trying to ascertain his status may try to show that they are equals or peers. In the small talk during unpacking, he may try to establish a common history like, "Remember when we . . ." or "You have also . . . , haven't you?" When the rehearsal starts, the player may make comments like, "This is how we always play this passage" or "Obviously, this should start upbow." If the others do not accept and follow these suggestions, the first player may revert to lecturing a player with inferior status. This tactic either succeeds or leads to counterattacks by the attacked player or another player.

Truly excellent musicians rarely engage in this sort of jockeying for power or esteem. A fine first violinist may say, "For my sake, could we please take from bar 65 again. This passage is a bit tricky." Everyone will see that the player making the suggestion is not the one who had made the mistake, but they also see that pointing fingers will not improve the situation. A climate in which admitting faults or problems is admissible and rewarded, rather than frowned on, results in far more effective (and enjoyable) rehearsals.

Truly excellent musicians rarely engage in . . . jockeying for power or esteem.

Now everyone lifts his or her bow to the strings and pays attention to the first violinist. On a cue indicating the tempo, we all start to play. Given that nothing completely disrupts the playing, the music continues without comments until the end of the movement. Everyone makes mental notes of coordination cues, unexpected and expected difficulties, interpretational ambiguities, and differences in interpretation between players. Listening to each other's playing, we have a first round of adjustment to each other, in tempo, pitch, volume, and style. Someone may say, "Could we please take it from B again. I did not quite understand it." But more likely the suggestion will be, "Okay, let's continue."

Setting and Achieving Standards

When the piece is finished, the negotiation starts. If there is a player who is obviously far more experienced than the others, that player will suggest what to do next, and everyone will follow. More probably, all players will suggest a passage as needing more rehearsal. After brief discussion, we reach consensus and lift the instruments in a first test of concentration and mental calibration. If all the quartet members are on an equal level, the playing will resume on a slight cue from one member. If, however, one member is less concentrated or not as agile, there will be a brief pause, followed by, "Um, from where, did you say?" Or, in a less open climate, after the playing starts, it soon turns out that one player has misunderstood. In these cases, the complete "flow" of thinking and acting together without an obvious command hierarchy breaks down, and at least one player takes on the role as "first-line supervisor," making certain that the less agile player receives unambiguous instructions. This works but shatters the magic of a rehearsal with "flow."

Once we start to rehearse various problem spots, we don't play the entire piece for quite some time. Attention to detail takes over. The rehearsal resembles a *kanban* production line where each player has the right to "pull the line," which stops the conveyor belt (the playing) and draws attention to a problem. Now there is discussion, demonstration, attentive playing, analysis, attempts to identify the root of the problem, and new attempts to reach the developing standards. Our first goal is to straighten out any major rhythmical misunderstandings, misreadings, or misprints. Another goal is to establish which passages deserve rehearsal as a quartet and which should be practiced alone before the next rehearsal. At times, a single bar will receive great attention to get the tuning or expression right. Sometimes a shorter passage will be analyzed, played very slowly, and then reassembled to achieve the desired result. Sometimes a problem spot is pinpointed, but left unresolved.

The negotiations on what to rehearse and what is "sufficient" quality are multifaceted. One concern is to use the available time so that the overall result is acceptable to all. Another consideration is the members' varying preferences for speed, intonation, distinctness, quality of tone, and a host of other aspects. The group generates and sets the standards of "acceptability," but may be influenced by outside factors. One member may not have as much time and accepts lower quality. Another may feel particularly responsible for the quality, based on the audience or some specific listener. Yet another may not be concerned with this particular performance and will accept less quality. For a quartet to work well, aspirations cannot be too different. An important aspect of developing a long-standing quartet relationship lies in knowing each other's standards and calibrating yours against your fellow players.

The search for quality consists of two logical (but not necessarily consecutive) steps. The first step roots out mistakes. The second makes the interpretation more interesting. The quality criteria of the first step deal with tolerance—what we consider to be "in tune," "rhythmically correct," and so on. Absolute goals concerning pitch and rhythm can be objectively determined, and the quartet successively establishes criteria for being sufficiently in tune and rhythmical. One player may have a narrow tolerance for pitch. Someone else may want more stringent treatment of rhythm, with the result that the pitch-proponent backs down or the striving for perfection increases, accompanied by a need for more time to achieve the new standards. The weight of each player's arguments may be based on how the others evaluate his or her expertness, on how closely the criteria match the general values of the music community, on the proponent's general leadership qualities, or on the proponent's degree of "ownership" of the performance. The other players may see the member who arranged the performance or assembled the quartet as more responsible toward the audience for the performance.

The second step, that of achieving a more interesting interpretation, involves a greater degree of developing norms and of calibrating ideals. Would a slightly higher tempo be better? How emotional do we want this passage to be? Is the balance between the instruments good, and if not, should the viola play louder or the other three softer? The road to achieving consensus, and to improving the result according to the developing ideals, is interactive knowledge evolution. Someone may phrase an idea in words and complement by demonstrating; then there is a renewed attempt at playing, while listening and feeling, followed by verbal feedback from the idea's originator or someone else. This quick feedback sequence is important, and, when leading to perceivable improvement, gives a feeling of flow—creative, enjoyable achievement, and improvement. If broken, it may lead to frustration. It may temporarily break when a player fails to understand another's comments. It may also break when a player is not at the same pace as the others. The fast feedback loop requires that agreeing on where to start playing is a minor detail and is often implicit. "Once more, please," followed instantly by playing is the basis for a different learning pace than, "Once more, please," followed by, "From where?" the explicit identification of the starting point, the verbal communication of it, the counting of bars, "Okay, now I've got it," and then playing.

During quick feedback, norms and ideals develop in parallel with the agreed-on improvement. The more a quartet rehearses together, the more the players learn about each other's norms and ideals, about listening to each other, and about how to reach consensus, and the

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more they construct shared ideals and norms. To some extent, the sequence allows the team to achieve a given result more quickly, but it need not result in fewer rehearsals. As the players learn more about functioning as a team, they may raise their standards and tackle new tasks. The urge to raise the standards may be a curse of quartet playing, but learning together is one of the great rewards.

Reflections on Quartets and Business

The symphony orchestra is functionally and hierarchically organized, although there is more local decision making and responsibility resting on each individual than might be immediately evident. In the string quartet, the formal structure is absent; I am struck by the amount of self-organizing. Even though a member may dominate in suggesting and forming decisions, the group does not consist of a leader and three subordinates. There is not even a formal, rotating leadership such as in the self-organizing groups of the Swedish manufacturing industry in the seventies and eighties. Quartets have constantly shifting leadership or continuous self-organizing—from moment to moment, issue to issue—and constant consensus building to develop and set standards and make other decisions.

The kind of communication that occurs in the string quartet is multifaceted and multisensory. Physical proximity provides the opportunity, emotional involvement provides a setting, and the nonverbal task and the need for continuous coordination provide a demand for using all available sensory input. In larger teams and more geographically dispersed teams, the physical proximity that enables rich communication rarely occurs. The members of a symphony orchestra have some physical proximity, but their sheer numbers—obstructing sight and hearing—crowd out opportunity for the quartet's rich communication and force a reliance on hierarchy and restricted cues.

The kind of communication that occurs in the string quartet is multifaceted and multisensory.

In companies, we tend to value rationality above emotions. This sets limits to what we regard as legitimate modes for, and topics of, communication. Verbal and graphical reports, presentations, and business meetings limit our communication to words and charts. The division of tasks into individual work packets with minimized interfaces and the accompanying minimization of meetings and time spent working together reduces our opportunities for training and learning to develop better communication.

In business, people revert to specific "team-building" activities, such as rafting or cooking together, to compensate for the lack of rich communication in everyday tasks. Sometimes I work with people with whom I have played in a quartet, and to some extent, the quartet experience helps us achieve better communication at work, but I feel that we do not always take full advantage of the potential. We view playing as playing and work as something else. Perhaps rafting, cooking, or quartet playing are needed to start building capabilities, but we might examine the opportunities of daily work settings for richer communication.

In quartet playing, the main work is rehearsing (and practicing); only a small amount of time is spent in direct contact with the audience—the customer, if indeed the audience *is* the customer. Perhaps we are the main customers ourselves? The reason for playing is not to make a living; a reason for making a living is to be able to play. However, the audience is present during the rehearsals too. We in the quartet decide on quality standards and ideals, but a part of our frame of reference is what we think the audience will appreciate and how it will react, based on experience and fantasies of the performance. During the performance, the interaction with the audience is only indirect; we can feel the attention, or lack of it, and perhaps enthusiasm or dislike for the performance (or the music), but the audience does not take part in the performance directly.

In business settings, at one end of the scale, there may be intense, observable interaction: the participants in a seminar may actively discuss an issue; the sales team and the customer will arrive at a deal in overt interaction. At the other end of the scale, the overt interaction may be even more limited than in a quartet: programmers designing software are, in many cases, never in direct contact with the customer; the kitchen staff rarely enters the dining room to meet the diners. The orchestra, somewhere in the middle of the scale, spends considerable time rehearsing, but also spends a large share of its time performing. An orchestra's interaction with the audience during performances is similar to a quartet's, but the command structure reduces the orchestra members' latitude in reacting to the audience.

The separation from the audience or customer has pros and cons. On the one hand, separation affords the quartet or team a sheltered space in which to experiment, make mistakes, and learn from, with, and about each other with no one else scrutinizing and evaluating their efforts and results. On the other hand, separation allows for the development of standards and ideals that may not appeal to audience or customers.

The extreme closeness in quartet rehearsals is coupled with high vulnerability. By working closely and communicating openly, members can annoy each other. Some quartet sessions are very tense, and quartet members may find that they want to avoid each other. Another vulnerability is that each has to play his or her part, with the resulting quality affected by each player's performance. If one player does not know his part, all the others suffer from it, and the resulting totality is unrewarding. If one player does not concentrate, the chances of having a fruitful rehearsal are limited. If one player is ill or absent, little useful rehearsing or performing can take place. This strong interdependence creates group pressure and can be quite stressful if not handled mindfully.

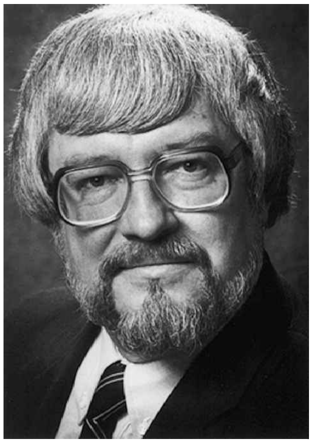
To conclude, I believe that, in reflecting on practices in the realm of music and, particularly, the self-organizing quartet, we can draw valuable inspiration. We can attempt to achieve rich listening to ourselves, our colleagues, and our counterparts in the business network and to our interactions—not just listening to what is said, but using all senses and allowing feelings and emotions to play a part. The interactive and mutual nature of giving cues, perceiving, following, and calibrating in reaching consensus that quartet rehearsals exhibit can influence our view of leadership, standard setting, and decision making. Finally, by using the example of an organization in which learning is constantly the focus, we can question the set routines and practices of our daily work. Do we want to change the balance between learning and performing?

Notes

1. The normal tuning of a piano today is a compromise: a "well-tempered" tuning that allows music to be played in any key without sounding too out of tune but no chord to be perfectly in tune.
2. *Amateurs* originally meant "those who love what they are doing." I have met professional musicians who are amateurs in this sense, and those who are not. I have also met many nonprofessionals who are more accomplished musicians than some professionals.

Commentary

by Karl E. Weick



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Management and music have gone together ever since Peter Drucker equated managers with symphony conductors and envisioned the symphony orchestra as the epitome of the flat organization (specialists play directly to the conductor without an intermediary). Here's a typical Drucker quote: "The task of creating a genuine whole also requires that the manager in every one of his acts consider simultaneously the performance and results of the enterprise as a whole and the diverse activities needed to achieve synchronized performance. It is here, perhaps, that the comparison with the orchestra conductor fits best. A conductor must always hear both the whole orchestra and, say, the second oboe" (Drucker, 1973). What is missing here are newer emphases on teams, improvisation, project leaders, and collective interpretation. Drucker is aware of these untouched issues, as was clear in a 1997 interview: "The soloists, the chorus, the ballet, the orchestra all have to come together—but they have a common score. What we are increasingly talking about today are diversified groups that have to write the score while they perform. . . . What you really need now is a good jazz group. . . . So how can you have a big company or a very big organization when you have to develop the score as you go along? Today you build different teams. Sounds beautiful. Yet nobody has really found a way to do it" (Beatty, 1998).

This is a near perfect segue to Alf Westelius's article. He *has* found a way "to do it." And what he has found stays within Drucker's beloved classical tradition. By focusing on the more entrepreneurial world of string quartets, Westelius helps us understand some subtle determinants of learning in teams.

To mention just one example, Westelius describes the search for quality in quartets as "interactive knowledge evolution." This search takes place mainly in rehearsals where 90% of quartet work is done. Rehearsals are fascinating because they are sites where people try to learn despite frequent interruptions. This feature is nontrivial because interruptions produce agitation and strong emotion (Weick, 1995). And sustained agitation precludes swift learning. What is striking, therefore, is Westelius's finding that the better quartets maintain a "flow" of reworking, negotiation, and interrupting that the poorer quartets do not. The better the flow, the faster and deeper the learning. This is captured in the contrast between the person who says, "For my sake, can we take it from bar 65," and the person who says, "I don't understand the problem; where do you want us to start?"

This suggests that there are two layers of interruption that can interfere with learning, not just one. There is the interruption of content that occurs when any task that is moving toward completion is stopped unexpectedly. That is frustrating enough and slows learning. But there is also interruption of the smooth flow of repair work. When people can't agree on what needs repairing or how to do repair, this is a second source of interruption and represents an interruption of process. Interruption of both content and process should make for considerable agitation. If agitation increases, learning becomes more difficult, which raises agitation even more, which triggers a vicious circle that is made all the more vicious because people are in face-to-face contact. Good quartets don't fall into this trap. They use what Westelius calls "quick feedback." They signal the problem and then quickly play it out of existence. This resembles what military teams refer to as learning through an OODA loop—observe, orient, decide, act, observe, and so on (Sullivan and Harper, 1996). The important point here is that process interruptions may entrap people when they try to repair situations from the inside.

To convert inevitable interruptions into a flow of interrupting is to achieve an important part of self-organizing. A learning team may be distinguished as much by its competence at repairing, as by its competence at performing. Even more important, any kind of situated learning may be vulnerable to interruption twice over. Thus, the advantage of learning in the very same situation where you will perform the learned task cuts two ways. It makes it easier to implement what you learn, but it makes it harder to concentrate on learning when you keep getting interrupted just short of the goal.

This *Reflections* article is a wonderful medium for reflection. Westelius lures readers into the midst of some fascinating issues and invites them to think their way out. He argues, for example, that large differences in background among quartet players limit the repertoire of works that can be included in the quartet's library. But large differences in background may also increase the variety of interpretations that might be suggested. And in a world of competing quartets, success in being "more interesting" is non-trivial. Homogeneous backgrounds may encourage homogeneous interpretation, which may encourage predictable, uninteresting performances. That's what I mean by lures that compel us to think our way out. If quartets can do it, so can the rest of us.

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Commentary

by S.D. Noam Cook

Alf Westelius makes a welcome and provocative addition to an unfortunately small number of works on the significance of musical groups as models for understanding organizations in general and organizational learning in particular. The value of musical examples has been demonstrated in such work as Bougon and Weick's now classic reflections (1977) on cognition in the Utrecht Jazz

Orchestra, and Kao's recent book (1996) that uses playing jazz as a template for designing activities that can foster creativity in business.

Nonetheless, the most common non-business examples in the organizational literature seem to be drawn from the likes of sport and the military. But such examples, because of their ethos of competition and winning, along with their lingering gender bias, may have increasingly limited operational applicability to modern business organizations where competitiveness and winning are, at their best, by-products of cooperative and creative work among men and women. Accordingly, musical examples such as those Westelius offers, where learning how to work together closely and creatively is constantly central and essential to success, can offer valuable and practical insights. I wish to underscore two points from the article.

Westelius importantly points out that the work of music is more in rehearsal than in performance. Rehearsing is not simply a preparation for performing; it is the core of a musician's work, an end and a joy in itself. A performance is as much a public report of what has been learned in rehearsal as it is a creative exercise. This suggests a powerful model for organizations. In rehearsing, a group not only learns a piece, it establishes its own identity: in learning how to play together, learning what interpretations work, etc., the individual musicians establish themselves as a group with a particular identity and a particular expertise that is deployed in both rehearsal and performance. For musical groups, learning, creativity, and innovation are part of who they are and part of their on-going work. Many organizations would do well to explore ways of making this kind of creative learning part of daily work, not an interruption in it.

My sense of communication in large musical groups differs somewhat from that of Westelius. For him, an orchestra's "sheer numbers—obstructing sight and hearing—crowd out opportunity for the quartet's rich communication and forces a reliance on hierarchy and restricted cues." I see this as a difference of kind more than one of quality. As Westelius points out, there is a great deal of intimate and effectively precise communication that goes on within the sections of an orchestra (and, I would add, a chorus). This is rather like the communication within a team or work group in a large organization. But, in either case, small-group communication should not be isolated. It needs to be coordinated with and shaped by a different, less intimate—yet equally precise and effective—kind of communication that must go on at the level of the orchestra or the corporation. Otherwise, there is noise not music, disorder rather than productivity. There is a long tradition in the organizational literature of the importance at the level of the group of a "sense of the whole" (or "the field" or "the culture"). Today, this has a renewed importance, given the growing appreciation of the role of groups as innovators within larger organizations. Insightful examination of communication and innovation across the levels of larger musical groups, as Westelius shows, suggests valuable models for developing a more robust sense of how organizations can learn to develop and deploy this role.

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FEATURE

Learning in and from Improvising: Lessons from Theater for Organizational Learning

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> Everyday speech is a case of improvisation. More than that, it's a case of shared improvisation. You meet someone new and you create language together. There is a commerce of feeling and information back and forth, exquisitely coordinated. When conversation works, it is, again, not a matter of meeting halfway. It is a matter of developing something new to both of us.
>
> Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts*[1]

Some have suggested that jazz improvisation can teach us much about managerial practices. I propose that theatrical improvisation is an even richer well to draw from, partly because of the wealth of existing theories about improv, and partly because much performed jazz is, in fact, scripted. Drawing on my recent experience as a novice theater student, I outline some of these lessons from theater.

I had several goals for my sabbatical from 1994 to 1995: some of the usual stuff of academic life (revise a book manuscript for publication, reorganize another manuscript and get it ready for submission), others more personal (design the landscaping for the house, reconnect to the folk music and dance worlds with which I'd lost touch after moving from Boston to California). After years of teaching three nights a week (our master's program is designed for students who work full time), I was suddenly enriched by stretches of time to explore new activities. The city's main-stage theater advertised an acting class, and I signed up. The class was small—only three or four—and I was by far the oldest; the teacher was inexperienced with adults; and the subject was improv, which, had I known in advance, would have chased me away: I do not "make like an ice cream cone and melt," as the *Chorus Line* hoofer sings.

About halfway through the course, as I was skipping class in a convulsion of anxiety and self-doubt, I saw a notice that the city's musical theater was offering scene-based classes. I went. The class had already met twice, and the instructor was doubtful about adding a newcomer, especially one without recent experience. (Mine had been 36 years before at summer camp, not counting the college mime class that I skipped half the time in similar states of performance anxiety.) I assured him that I was in full sympathy with his concerns and shared them myself. I suggested that since I was there, he let me take the class that night. If, at the end of the class, either he or I felt that I was out of place, I would make like an ice cream cone on a hot day and disappear.

By the end of the evening, I was hooked, even though the class was grounded in many exercises I recognized from the improv course, and the instructor tried to persuade me that I must have blocked out extensive prior experience. I finished that class, signed up for the next semester, and went back for two more the following year. (I tried a third year, but couldn't manage it with my teaching schedule.) Aside from the explicit, intended content of the classes, I found the exercises and lessons tremendously insightful not only for teaching, but for managing as well, and especially for theorizing about organizational learning.

Improvising

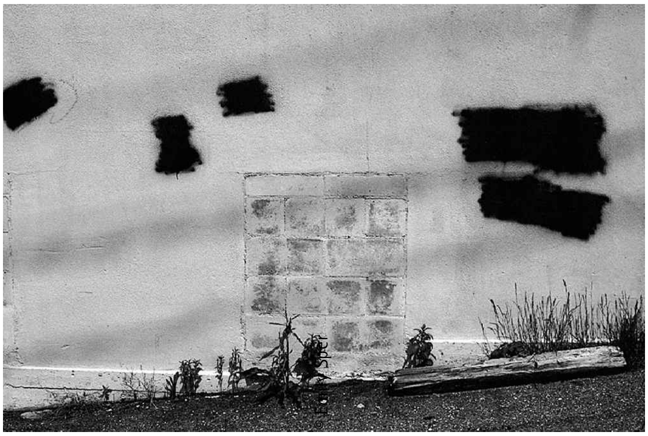
Possibly the most egregious misunderstanding about improvisation—whether in a theater setting or in an organization—is the notion that improvised activities are invented on the spot, from scratch, as if in a void, without any preparation and without context. What became clear to me in both the improv and the scene classes is the extent to which improv teams practice together—work together, interact together, and observe one another extensively, over time. Improvised activity, invented "in the moment" in response to some provocation (a concept in the theater, a crisis in the workplace), builds on extended, prior conjoint experience and mutual, collective, inter-knowing (as well as self-knowledge). There is extended preparation (training or apprenticeship) in the rules of engagement, the rules of practice. In the class, I learned to know the body language, facial gestures, tones of voice, and rhythms of my classmates; these subtle knowings guided me in choosing when to intervene and with whom. I learned to know whom I could count on to interrupt me in order to take over a scene, or whom I could count on in a scripted scene for the emotional support necessary to carry the point home. (The difference between a class and a troupe, I warrant, is that the troupe's director weeds out the individuals who cannot be counted on, as she builds a team of members who all pull their weight.)

These are some of the principles of improvisation: it rests on sustained practice over time; the engagement is a collective undertaking; and it is focused on its subject. Improv terminology for this focus is "being in the moment." The actor has to be fully present, fully engaged in the enterprise at hand. If the scene is about surfing in Malibu, introducing an Eskimo floating by on an iceberg will require a tremendous leap of logic (or faith). This ties in with a fourth principle, which holds for theater in general, not just improv: activity is purposive, and each character has, or works to establish, an objective in his or her scene.

. . . the most egregious misunderstanding about improvisation . . . is the notion that improvised activities are invented on the spot, from scratch, as if in a void . . .

Lastly, team members support each other. In theatrical improv, this support has two dimensions: "Taking care of your partner," and "Yes, and . . ." Taking care of your partner requires other-directedness—being "in the moment," attuned to what your teammate is saying and doing, rather than focusing on yourself and what other people are thinking about you. "Yes, and . . ." requires you to respond to what was just said, to affirm it, and then add to it to move the action to the next phase. If a teammate says to you, as you walk on stage, "Hi, Mom," your response, "Gosh, Sis, what are you doing here?" would be a very bad "Yes," making the "and" problematic. In improv, such a move is called a "block," "a refusal to accept an offer and thus a denial of the reality as established by the first improvisor."[2] "Yes, and . . ." is another way in which team members are attuned to each other, taking care of each other and of the (inter)action and focusing on the collective, on the purpose, and on being in the moment.

The lessons from improv for workplace practices are transparent. Improvisation will flourish only on the basis of mutual experience built up over time, both in terms of familiarity with workplace practices—the activities that are central to the organization's or group's purpose—and in terms of interactive, interpersonal knowledge and reliance. The establishment of collective, practice-oriented familiarity and trust enable improvisatory acts directed toward an organization's or group's purpose under conditions that foster other-directed care and undistracted attention to that purpose. Managers can stifle improvisational acts by curtail-



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ing opportunities for such conditions to grow. For example, they may constantly rotate personnel on short notice or not encourage the development of teams and teamwork: strangers are not likely to improvise together.

I see specific implications of these lessons in three areas: organizational learning, research methods, and teaching and other professional practices.

Improv and Organizational Learning

For organizational learning scholars theorizing from an individual/psychological approach, the problem has been to describe "organization" empirically. For collective organizational learning scholars, the problem has been to describe "collective learning" empirically (Cook and Yanow, 1993; Weick and Westley, 1996; Yanow, 2000a). The acts of an improv team provide an empirical example, and theorizing about those acts brings out the following dimensions of a cultural-interpretive approach to organizational learning.

First, organizational learning is practice-based, focused on sustained interaction with the materials or processes of that practice over time. It is context-specific, situated "in the moment." The context of work practices provides the constraints—the rules of engagement—within which improvisation happens. That it is not scripted is its improvisational quality. The learning is, instead, dynamic and provisional.

Second, organizational learning is a collective, group, or team undertaking. The learning is undertaken by the group, within the group, focusing on the group's activities. Practice-based learning is interactive in another sense: it cannot be done by any individual acting on his or her own. Karl Weick tells the story of a Los Angeles fire captain who arrived at the scene of a fire after his crew had already deployed personnel. He launched into his own action without coordinating with the crew, causing injuries and additional loss of property.[3] Organizational learning is not the activity of a "loose cannon" or "freelancer" acting for or on behalf of the organization. "Yes, and . . ." is built on trust; it requires taking care of the team.

. . . organizational learning is a collective, group, or team undertaking.

Third, these characteristics mean that not all of organizational learning is visible, nor is it measurable in conventionally researchable ways. What can be seen is mastery in action, in practice, through an *ex post* reflective sensemaking, as researchers observe organizational members engaging with the language and physical artifacts or objects used in that practice. This is tacit knowledge in Polanyi's sense: something learned while focusing on something else (Polanyi, 1966), whether that is organizational structures learned while focusing on action or some other aspect of organizational life.

Improv and Research Methods

I have argued elsewhere that a collective-cultural approach to organizational learning requires research methods appropriate to capturing its practice-oriented focus (Yanow, 2000a). As I reflect on what I have learned from improvisation classes, I see many of the same characteristics in interpretive methods (Yanow, 2000b). Observing (with whatever degree of participation in) the action at hand and conversational, in-depth interviewing require improvising in the moment. In the context of the situation, of one's role, and of the rules of engagement stipulated by those methods, the researcher does a lot of "Yes, and . . . ," acknowledging what he or she has just been told and responding in such a way as to move the conversation or interaction forward. This is likely an uncomfortable role for the Shakespearean or other script-oriented actor. For him or her, the scientific method, survey research, and statistical analyses are closer parallels in that they entail less improvisatory open-endedness.

But interpretive methods are no less methodical and systematic: "interpretive" does not mean "impressionistic." Methodicalness and systematicness reside, first, in training and preparation and then in sustained observation over time, as we have seen in improv. In fact, one of the reasons interpretive methods are denigrated may derive from the academy's privileging of scripted action—of the text—over more situational, in-the-moment improvisatory acts.

Improv in Teaching and Other Professions

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Ed Schein once remarked to me about the extent to which he saw elements of clinical consulting practices reflected in improv. I suspect that he may have been responding to the insights that I derived for classroom teaching and for interpretive research methods.

How often, in making a presentation, does the professor focus on him- or herself in relation to the listeners, concentrating on not screwing up and on looking good to the students? We could learn from improv to shift our focus to our partners in this activity—our students—and stay actively focused on them. If I am so focused on myself (my hair, my dress, my rumbling stomach, my aching feet), I am not in the moment.

What a profound, if subtle, shift in casting occurs when my students become my partners in the learning enterprise. I cannot then maintain the "firehose" or "empty vessel" theory of pedagogy, in which the professor is the repository of all wisdom and the students are waiting to be filled with knowledge. This shift recasts students as active agents, rather than passive reactors, equally responsible for their own learning. That also lets me off the hook in important, freeing ways. This conception of the learning process and the student-professor relationship is more democratic, with direct implications for many other professional and workplace-based roles.

One of a professor's worst nightmares is to arrive in class having forgotten lecture notes or having grabbed the wrong file. Were we more open to improvisation, knowing that years of practice have prepared us for such an event, we might lose the fear of being scriptless, and the nightmare would melt away.

The Socratic or case-based method of teaching is a largely unscripted, situated bricolage, although it is well prepared and practiced. It is "Yes, and . . ." in action, taking what the student says and building on it for the professor's purpose, much as conversational interviewing "Yes, and . . ." is for the researcher's purpose. Together, as partners, professor and students weave that day's oral "script," only to have it dissipate at the end of the session, except for ideas jotted in a notebook, remembered footholds in professor's and students' minds. What more could improv hope for?

Improvisatory Practice

What is required in all three contexts—workplace learning, the research site, the classroom—is practical judgment.[4] John Forester draws a contrast between the "human calculator" who "tries to be a skilled engineer" and the person of practical judgment who "tries to be a sensitive and principled moral improviser" (Forester, 1999: 224). The latter does not engage in unprincipled *ad hoc*-ery any more than the participant-observer/ethnographer does. To capture the difference, the philosopher Martha Nussbaum turns to improv: "The salient difference between acting from a script and improvising is that one has to be not less but far *more* keenly attentive to what is given by the other actors and by the situation. You cannot get away with doing anything by rote; you must be actively aware and responsive at every moment" (quoted in Forester, 1999: 225).

Based on my own years of nonacademic practice, I think that practitioners know this. I think that the search for scripted practice—for regularities and formulas, whether of leadership or of learning—has been largely driven by academics, in a misguided application of nineteenth and twentieth century positivist science to delimit and control human ambiguity. It has cost us the lessons that improv can teach: the contextual, human richness of being in the moment and of taking care of our partners.

Some years ago, Linda Smircich wrote of feeling love for her class (Smircich, 1985: 70). Improv teaches us to see our employees, clients, research subjects, and students as our partners. It is, in the end, much more in keeping with democratic values.

Acknowledgments

These thoughts expand on reflections offered at the plenary session of the 1999 Academy of Management meetings in Chicago, "From Theater to Management: Reflections on Second City Improvisation." Mary Crossan organized and chaired the session. Rob Nickerson, a member of the Second City improv troupe, facilitated the audience discussion of their improvisation exercises. My thanks to Second City's actors and especially Rob Nickerson, to Mary Crossan, to panelists Mary Jo Hatch, Anne Miner, and Karl Weick, and to Ed Schein.

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2. Rob Nickerson, Second City Improv Troupe (Chicago). Rob credits Keith Johnstone, founder of Theatresports, with the "Yes, and . . ." concept; my teacher attributed it to Sanford Meisner. The conflicting attributions indicate the extent to which this concept has taken hold in theater training and practice.
3. Related at the plenary session, "From Theatre to Management: Reflections on Second City Improvisation," Chicago, Academy of Management, 1999.
4. Aristotle spoke of this as *phronesis* (sometimes called "practical reasoning"). I discuss the link between local knowledge and practical reasoning in Yanow (2000b).

Commentary

by Michael Jones

Michael Jones
Pianist, composer, author, and speaker

As I read Dvora Yanow's article on improvisation, I recalled my own parallel experience as a young pianist accompanying a dance class. It was my first day, so like Yanow, I was experiencing feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. It turned out to be a turning point in my development as an improvisational pianist.

On that fateful morning, the dance instructor, looking toward where I was seated at the piano, called out to me, "Michael, I want to warm up the class with some improvisational movement. Could you please play some music with the feeling of rain in it for us?"

"Rain," I thought. I had played Bach, Haydn, and Mozart, but I had not been taught to play "rain." Quickly, I turned to the box of music I had collected earlier that morning. As the instructor walked toward the piano, I frantically searched for something with "rain" in the title. I was just looking through "Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head" when she emphatically said, "No, no, Michael, not sheet music—just something that has the feeling of rain in it!" As she spoke, she demonstrated lightly on the upper keys. "Like this," she said.

As she returned to the class, I put my fingers on exactly the same notes as she had and started to play. In moments, the dancers were moving across the floor, fluttering their fingers, and letting their bodies convey the impression of rain dripping off trees and bushes and drenching the ground. "Now wind!," the instructor called out.

"Wind," I sighed. "I was just getting good at rain!" Again, I followed her lead. With broad, sweeping motions, I developed a rhythmic pattern. As I did, the dancers executed broad, bold leaps across the floor. "Now thunder and lightning," the instructor called out, using a voice that suggested the heightening of intensity and dramatic intent. Now I was ready for anything! The experience awakened a memory from my summers attending a camp in the near wilderness of central Ontario. I remembered playing the old upright piano beside a large open window in the lodge, feeling the wind and rain and thunder as the great storms bent the pines and stirred the wind-tossed waves. To discover what this new world was trying to be, I needed to feel it, to experience its beauty firsthand, so that when I played, my fingers would be the rain and my hands would be the wind.

The dance class was an introduction to leading by following, or what poet T.S. Eliot spoke of as the "awful daring of a moment's surrender." It is not uncommon for musicians to speak of this moment of letting go as a time when they could not tell whether they were playing or *being* played.

Yanow also writes of improvisation as "not invented from scratch, as if in a void, without any advanced preparation and without context." I agree. Both preparation and context, from my experience, are very important. Preparation provides opportunities for practice, and context elevates our ability to attend to the creation at hand. Practice alone, however, usually is not the experience of improvisation itself; it merely prepares us for it. Practice gives us the strength, confidence, and resilience to ride the pure wind without either shrinking from the unexplored territory of creation or losing one's way in it.

What sustains improvisation is the void itself, a willingness to risk going into the great unknowing—not with caution, exactly, but with a wise blindness that aligns us with the leadings of the moment. Our guide becomes a compelling question or sense of curiosity rather than a drive to achieve. It is this great sense of mystery and miracle—where there was nothing, there is now something—that gives artists the hope and inspiration to go on. In this respect, improvisation teaches us to honor what is and what wants to be, rather than any preconception about what *ought* to take place. This openness to the moment-to-moment unfolding of an inner reality—adjusting our thinking as the scene unfolds, as Yanow suggests—makes improvisation not only a technique or skill but also a foundation for living and leading in a rapidly changing world.

In this context, I am reminded of the story about the American painter James McNeill Whistler, in a cafe in Paris, listening to people try to explain the origins of art. Their discussion was wide ranging, as they argued about how heredity, environment, the political state of the times, and so on influence the artist. After overhearing all these arguments, Whistler simply interjected, "Art happens." Indeed, there is something mysterious about art. It is not merely an abstraction of life, nor can it ever be understood as such. Art is an experience, and "art happens" for the artist every time he or she creates. If we live in an improvisational universe—one in which art is different each time we create—a useful question to consider is not, "How do we improvise?" but rather, "How can we *not* improvise?" The world is a place of mystery; as soon as we begin to improvise, we find ourselves immersed in a creative matrix whose only certainty is constant change.

If "art happens," we don't need to learn to improvise, we *are* an improvisation. We ourselves are the result of a loving inquiry that has been unfolding since the beginning of time. It is in our nature to be attracted to the truth that each moment calls for. And this truth changes. Each time we think we have grasped it, it has moved again. "The human mind cannot become creative on its own," psychologist Walter Otto says. "Even under the most favorable circumstances, it needs to be touched and inspired by a wonderful Otherness; the efficacy of this Otherness forms the most important part of the total creative process, no matter how gifted we are thought to be" (Otto, 1965).

This "Otherness" takes many forms. Most commonly, it is another person. But it can also be an idea, an organization, a musical instrument, a blank canvas, an image, an audience: anything that speaks to us and attracts our full attention represents this Otherness and serves as our partner in creation. Otherness is important because improvisation is reciprocal. The attraction to the Other sets up a resonant field—a circular flow of energy—in which the cues that guide our improvisation originate not in either partner but in the generative space that lies between. In this manner, "art happens." Neither party in the improvisation leads or follows in sequence. They are doing both at the same time. In this act of forgetting ourselves, we begin to see the familiar and ordinary in an entirely new light. To engage with the Other with this kind of responsiveness and sensitivity involves adjusting our ears away from the business of the everyday and toward the subtle sounds of the imaginary world.

In this way, one could think of the imagination as a kind of sensory organ, an aesthetic sensitivity that involves listening for the "echoes" or cues that usually go either unheard or screened out. For example, Yanow's perceptual context of theater includes body language, facial gestures, tones of voice, and the rhythm of her class members. Each of these helps her know when to intervene and with whom. My own aesthetic at the piano relates to the "art of touch." It includes letting notes fall lightly from the keys rather than forcing them, molding and shaping the notes rather than striking them. It is my intent to express what I sense, which requires a suppleness in my hands and clarity of articulation to convey an ease, freshness, and fluidity in my playing. To accomplish this, I must sense the feeling of a piece, including the complex relationships among tempo, mood, harmony, weight, and tone.

My impression is that, even when we are well practiced, meeting with another is not a common experience for many of us—including artists. Most of us have been educated to value independence and autonomy, and it is often considered a sign of weakness to let go to a process that involves aligning ourselves with forces over which we have no control. Yanow points to this when she says, "In improv, such a move is called a 'block,' 'a refusal to accept an offer and thus a denial of the reality as established by the first improviser.'"

Ultimately, improvisation is a dance with creation itself.

Ultimately, improvisation is a dance with creation itself. No matter whether we are teachers, leaders, technicians, or artists, we are all beholden to the same muse. And while the muse can be tenacious and insistent, she is also shy. If we refuse her call too often, she will leave us. And once gone, it is difficult to coax her back. Yet if we practice regularly, the development of this aesthetic sensibility can strengthen our faith in improvisation and in our capacity to create an atmosphere that welcomes the muse. This capacity for open-hearted, noncritical receiving is particularly important, because we rarely receive her visitations in a form that makes sense to us at the time. We have to assume, as poet William Stafford said about his process of writing a poem, that "there must be some reason for whatever is occurring to us." For Stafford, every impulse had its reasons, and he religiously followed each of them into a poem. He was a wonderfully prolific poet because he did not willingly refuse any call. To prepare himself to receive the muse, he willingly followed whatever occurred to him, no matter how foolish it might have appeared at the time. "If you behave alertly and readily," he said, "you will not dismiss your own ideas, your own pictures, your own puzzlement" (Stafford, 1978).

Often we refuse the call because we are too quick to dismiss an idea as foolish or impractical. This attitude blocks the very inspiration in which we must put our entire faith if we are to create anything at all. Impatience, judgment, and disapproval make it difficult for us to readjust our ear to the nuances of creation. "There are leadings without any reason but they attract," Stafford wrote (Stafford, 1986). By following these leadings, we fulfill improvisation's deepest call, which is not art for art's sake, but something greater. If we are willing to accept and work with what is being given to us now, then magic occurs. Then more ideas—better ones—will come to us later on. As Yanow suggests, training only in scripted practice does not equip us for engaging with unscripted images and ideas, particularly when they (at least at first) appear to us as trivial or odd.

This helps to explain why we so often refuse the call: we simply don't hear it. Over the years, so many of us have trained our minds to shut out anything that appears peculiar, trivial, or a waste of time. This may also explain the fear many feel when they try to improvise. It is the fear of inadequacy in the face of a blank page, the dark void, combined with the fundamental belief that what we have been given is not enough or that we are not qualified. Yet it is from this very place of "insufficiency" that all true creative work begins. When I am improvising with another, I must set aside my repertoire. In its place, I begin with a question. Then I let the question lead me into a process whose outcome remains uncertain, although that outcome has often proven itself to be superior to anything I might have imagined or conceived before I began. And it *is* frightening to set aside our certainties. For most of us, they represent the substance of who we are, what we know, and all that we have achieved. In a series of talks he gave at Harvard in 1967 and 1968, poet Jorge Luis Borges put it well: "Every time I am faced with a blank page, I feel that I have to rediscover literature for myself. . . . The past is of no avail whatever to me. I am nearing seventy and I have only my perplexities to offer you. I have given the major part of my life to literature, and I can offer you only my doubts" (Borges, 2000).

Improvisation is a conversation that begins with thinking, not thought. Because thinking—as distinct from thought, which is a finished product, a record of that which has already been created—leads with a question rather than an answer, we experience it as being somehow inconclusive and incomplete. What we may not recognize is that, once set in motion, improvisation continues to do its work through a process of unconscious elaboration, even when we turn our attention to something else. Much of my own musical development, for example, has occurred while I have been taking walks. What always sustains my improvisation is an inquiry, including the doubts, uncertainties, and perplexities it holds.

Having said all this, improvisation is no guarantee of success. It is, however, a key to accessing the abundance of the imagination and aesthetic rewards of a dedicated life. If we can stay the course of uncertainty, we will encounter an experience of wonder—a state in which we may come to know ourselves as full partners in the act of creation, knowing that as we create, we are also being created. In other words, with imaginative labor, the goal is not reached through knowing where we are going. Instead, it becomes apparent that we are in the right place after we have arrived. It is an experience that comes only, as Yanow says, to those who are willing to live an unscripted life.

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FEATURE

Learning the Art of Neighborhood

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There are many reasons, from inspiration to conviction, to introduce arts into the urban environment or social settings to enhance the quality of life for all. In the UK and the US, there have been many flagship building projects aimed at changing how urban dwellers regard their cities and how others perceive the urban environment. However, when regeneration efforts focus on people, rather than buildings, the effects of the arts are notoriously difficult to establish, let alone replicate at a practical level. These effects matter when resources have to be justified in competition with apparently more urgent needs.

Look Ahead Housing and Care, an association based in the UK that owns and manages some 1,500 hostels and housing projects, offers a compelling story of the effects of a high-quality arts program in a hostel for homeless people in the East End of London. After an arts program was established in one hostel, evictions from the hostel for violence were reduced by more than half at a time when they were expected to escalate. And the sponsorship return on Look Ahead's original financial investment stands at 117%. In addition, the Look Ahead administration has learned that, rather than simply providing accommodation for some of the most vulnerable people in society, by introducing art, it can be a stimulus for building community across the socioeconomic spectrum and provide learning opportunities for neighbors in the surrounding area.

When we evaluated the arts program some three years ago, our aim was to illuminate the program's effect on all involved and to reveal the management challenges faced by housing and arts practitioners and those wishing to shape policy on their behalf. We took an approach based on the principles of the learning organization. This entirely new perspective for such an evaluation demonstrates that the arts can provide a continually renewable source of learning, stimulating connections beyond stereotype. We used the findings as a basis for the extension of the arts program across the full range of Look Ahead's accommodations. We also brought the story of Aldgate, an old seamen's hostel, to the attention of the UK's Minister for Culture, who recognized the program as one of the most outstanding examples of arts addressing issues of social exclusion in the UK. In this article, we summarize some key learning points.

Setting the Scene

Look Ahead Housing and Care provides accommodation for vulnerable people in London and the southeast region of the UK. One of its buildings, Aldgate Hostel, is an old seamen's hostel on Dock Street, a five-minute walk from the Tower of London, a major tourist attraction. The hostel is bordered by a disused church, an elementary school, businesses, small shops, and cafés. Nearby is a busy road junction with two railway bridges and, at the outset of the arts program, a neglected streetscape. A private housing development has been built at the rear of the hostel next to a Victorian theatrical treasure—Wilton's Music Hall.

The rooms at Aldgate vary in size, with shared bathrooms. The communal spaces include the foyer, dining room, games room, access center, quiet room, cinema, and art rooms in the basement. The hostel provides breakfast and an evening meal. The staff holds regular meetings with residents. Residents are charged rent, which is paid out of their state housing benefit.

There are 35 staff people and 163 residents (approximately 28% women and 72% men). Of those, 99.1% are unemployed. People gain access to the hostel by referring themselves (22%) and through outreach teams (78%). In 1997, people who were sleeping in the streets were made a priority. Residents' stays vary from weeks to months to sometimes years. The cultural background of residents is 47% British or European, 21% African, 9% Caribbean, 5% Irish, and 5% Asian. About a third describe themselves as black, and a small percentage are refugees or asylum seekers. Residents range in age from 15% under age 21 to a majority between 25 and 40, with 20% aged 40 to 60.

Impetus for the Arts Program

In 1993, Look Ahead's chief executive, Victoria Stark, decided to make a last ditch attempt to reverse the terminal decline in Aldgate's atmosphere and reputation. She appointed a less authoritarian but more effective hostel manager and a team of workers with responsibility for residents' accommodation and mental health needs. She evicted the most disruptive residents and installed security systems. At the same time, she took steps to establish an arts program as part of a fundamental change to the physical environment and ambiance of the hostel.

The first rule when preparing for an arts program is to assume that it is not a quick fix. Two years after Stark decided to change things at Aldgate Hostel, the arts program was initiated in earnest. Stark also acknowledged that since this was not her area of expertise, she needed guidance. Early on, Stark met Jean Horstman, then a freelance arts adviser with knowledge of arts and housing, and invited her to help Look Ahead initiate the arts program, design a management structure, and appoint a manager.

Stark also knew that such an initiative would not work if it was entirely the fiefdom of the chief executive. She needed to spread ownership and inspiration among her staff. From experience, Horstman knew that it was difficult for people to understand the role of arts in housing without direct shared experience, because they can understand "the arts" only in terms of their own most recent experience of them. In Britain, still imbued with class issues, the arts are often seen to be only for "posh" people. Others are suspicious of self-reflexive contemporary arts practice or patronizing arts programs for "the poor folks." At all levels of society, people are too frequently deprived of high-quality arts programs in school and thus rarely have common points of reference.

[People] can understand "the arts" only in terms of their own most recent experience of them.

For these deep-seated cultural reasons, staff and board members were skeptical about the relevance of a sustained arts program in the problematic setting of Aldgate Hostel. Stark and Horstman knew that they needed to inspire people from direct experience in order to move the program forward.

As a first step, Stark and some staff members visited the artists and staff of a pioneering community development program, Bromley-by-Bow Centre, where the arts have played a seminal role. Immediately, the Look Ahead staff's commitment began to strengthen. They were personally inspired, a first step in a shared learning experience for staff and the chief executive. The visit took them away from their familiar setting and encouraged them to look at their surroundings differently.

It took a year to build the staff team to support the arts program at both the hostel and head office. This team included the Aldgate hostel manager, the head of hostels, and someone from the maintenance department. As a group and individually, team members visited other examples of artists working in a community development or health setting. The process itself helped forge a different mode of communication across departments.

Meanwhile, for her introduction to Aldgate, Horstman toured the building with staff. The tour enabled them to see the hostel through new eyes. Horstman pointed out that none of the natural wood, old maritime paintings, or areas around the paintings in the hostel had been damaged. The greatest destruction seemed to occur in the ugliest or least well-designed areas. The damage occurred where the décor felt institutional.

Recruiting the Arts Coordinator

Aldgate needed an arts coordinator to plan the program, raise additional funds, contract and manage artists, and communicate with other staff. Stark wanted someone with a challenging, contemporary aesthetic rather than a candidate from a more traditional community arts background. Horstman drew up a job description, specifications, and an advertisement, which she discussed with Look Ahead's committee to win support. The committee set broad aims for the program, to which the staff agreed:

- To create a sense of welcome for the hostel's staff, residents, and neighbors.
- To provide a sense of the hostel as home, created by a team of staff and residents.
- To create an environment that recognizes the self-worth of residents and staff.

After the arts coordinator candidates toured the hostel in small groups, they were asked to propose the first steps they would take to develop the program. Two young women, Helen Carey and Tamar Arnon, who ran their own commercial arts company, TC Arts, made the best proposal. Look Ahead appointed them as part-time consultants. That they also worked on other projects meant they kept their feet in the art world and could bring those contacts and fresh perspectives to Look Ahead. Without this, there was a danger the program could become institutionalized. Look Ahead was not appointing social workers, but arts curators whose canvas became the hostel.

Over time . . . disruption came to be valued as a way to stimulate flexibility and a spirit of enterprise across the organization.

Settling in: Management Issues

Within the first six months, management needed to make certain adaptations to ensure smooth operation with procedures at the head office and to establish common points of reference between TC Arts and Look Ahead staff, particularly in the area of maintenance. During the first phase of their work, Carey and Arnon visited various arts projects, set up an arts steering committee, and established communications with other Look Ahead departments, such as public relations. The staff team and the arts managers acknowledged that the new initiative would undoubtedly thrust new demands on established ways of doing things. Over time, this disruption came to be valued as a way to stimulate flexibility and a spirit of enterprise across the organization. Together, they established the aims of the arts program in a three-year plan:

© Felix Reyes-Nunez

From a project at another Look Ahead hostel, self-portrait by Felix Reyes-Nunez, with assistance of artists Michele Fuirer and Andrew Fisher, Serpentine Gallery.

- To help residents view their stay at Aldgate positively, giving them confidence to plan their futures.
- To enhance and improve the quality of the hostel environment for both residents and staff in a permanent and progressive manner.
- To discover and encourage talents, either in the arts or elsewhere, through the environment-enhancement project and special events program.
- To put Aldgate Hostel on the map locally and initiate a program for the larger community; to endorse pride in the locale.
- To take this opportunity to contribute to art both locally and nationally.

A distinguishing feature of the program was this last principle. It was the artistic ambition that enabled the program to connect with people beyond the hostel's boundaries.

Involving Residents and Staff

Getting the process of consultation right was critical to getting commitment from residents and staff. Carey and Arnon quickly learned to work within the hostel's prevailing culture. The unpredictable and immediate nature of life at Aldgate meant that consultation on paper was difficult. Direct dialogue proved to be far more successful. Carey and Arnon consulted residents outside the dining room after people finished their evening meals so they could contact most of the residents. Even those people who did not stop to give an opinion were curious. When the consultations were followed by practical results, people felt they had been seen and heard. For example, even if the paint colors they chose for redecoration were not used, they knew they had been consulted. The process of consultation helped to extend a sense of ownership of the hostel and communicated a shift of ambiance from an institution to a home.

Workshops, Events, and Partnerships

The arts coordinators chose artists to lead the workshops based on the quality of their artistic practice, robustness of approach, outgoing personalities, and appeal across age, culture, and gender. Artists who are leaders in their fields often led workshops, all of which were of outstanding quality.

One of the first artists to work at the hostel was Rob Mulholland, a sculptor and furniture designer from Glasgow. After consulting with residents, he evolved designs for the games room, one of the communal spaces that was key to transforming the hostel's atmosphere. Many residents felt the room was threatening, and the women, in particular, were reluctant to enter it. The process of reinventing and reclaiming the space via the creation of shared artifacts and custom-designed furniture made the room seem safe. Enamel panels were also created for the entrance hall. The images used on these emerged from workshops and depicted the hands of groups of residents. These panels, together with specially designed seating, created a sense of welcome for anyone entering the building. There was a tangible reduction in fear.

Following a series of interviews with mosaic artists, ceramicist Rebecca Newnham was commissioned to redesign the bathrooms. The designs emerged from workshops with residents. Another leading ceramic artist, Duncan Hooson, designed and led workshops to improve the corridors. Witnessing the work under way prompted new conversations and new connections among residents and staff.

Other participatory workshops included mosaics, enamel panels, photography, filmmaking, printmaking, furniture-making, ceramics, drawing, and drama. Many took part in the workshops: around 22 artists or designers

© Tamar Arnon

A resident of Aldgate Hostel works on a mosaic, led by artist Duncan Hooson.

led workshops or produced commissions; approximately 10 to 15 residents participated in each of the 83 workshops.

Along with the core activities, many other positive opportunities have spun out of the program. These include a football team; culinary events with a theme, notably a Caribbean meal and a French cheese evening; walks in the country or to the coast; trips to exhibitions and theater performances; visits to businesses involved in the arts program; production of a newsletter, and workshops with local schools.

Impact of the Program

Look Ahead's financial investment in the first three years of the arts program was £60,000. Income of £17,880 via sponsorship and donations was generated for the arts program at the hostel and of £87,000 (with an additional £25,500 pledged in 1998), for One Mile East, a wider neighborhood arts program. This was a return on investment of 117% over three years. Cash sums have been significantly enlarged through sponsorship in kind from 47 sources. The percentage return takes no account of the significant goodwill generated through the program or improved public and staff resident relations.

. . . the impact of the arts program emerges from the experiences of all who came into contact with it and demonstrates art's power to shift perceptions.

When the hostel manager had first arrived, she described conditions as appalling. The staff barricaded themselves in the office. There was widespread drug dealing, pimping, and prostitution. No staff member went alone into the rest of the building without a walkie-talkie. From the first day, Carey and Arnon ignored these conditions and, in the words of one grant-maker, "just blew fear out of the building by laughing it away."

Ultimately, the impact of the arts program emerges from the experiences of all who came into contact with it and demonstrates art's power to shift perceptions. Residents' comments illuminate best what they gained:

> Things like this bring you up and help you find some self-worth. It showed me there were people in the hostel who were worth getting to know. It's easier to build a bond when you're sharing activities.

> Doing something different is great. Otherwise you just live off your giro [state benefit check] and when that runs out, you stay in your room. I was sick the day of the first workshop, but Tamar persuaded me. When I came, I liked it a lot and then I forgot I was sick. I didn't like art till I came here. It's a positive atmosphere; it gets your brain working.

> There is nothing else positive happening in the hostel, so the art workshops are like an oasis. I have put things up in my room and went to an exhibition which really opened my mind.

> I did a drawing workshop and learned different techniques and all about different tones. I asked for some paper, and then when I was walking along, I'd see something and then fit it to another setting. Other people seem to like my drawings. I don't necessarily want to make a living out of drawing; it means something different to me.

> It's good to have ambitious things, to have something in the hostel that is not just about problems. It's nice seeing different sides of peoples' lives. There does not have to be an immediate payoff for it to be useful. It does not have to be just about training or jobs; it's valuable in itself, and the payoff may come later.

> Helen and Tamar have given me a heart and a soul. I get a surprise in the workshops every time. I saw [my friend] laughing for the first time, smiling, with her face all beautiful. Normally everything is dragged down and heavy.

One participant recognized the part the program played in securing him a job and training in his chosen field, art direction in a film company. When he arrived, he said, "The culture in the hostel didn't encourage people to take initiative. I think people's behavior *has* changed. There is not so much mugging in the corridors."

Aldgate residents making a film. © Tamar Arnon

The arts program has also affected the hostel staff and made their jobs easier in some important respects. They noted that it contributed to a culture of mutual respect in the hostel and enabled people to be recognized as individuals with personalities and talents. They are not just identified by their problems. This began a virtuous circle. As mutual respect grew within the hostel, the quality of service from contractors improved. Previously, work often was done badly because the contractors didn't think the hostel deserved any better. Now they were proud of their work. The program also encouraged residents to take responsibility. With more activities, they could take on responsibility and reduce their dependency. Some staff members commented:

> The first thing I noticed was the residents making mosaics in the bathrooms. What was fantastic was that instead of only having discussions about problems, people were saying, "Look at that. Isn't it beautiful?"

> The physical environment makes a huge difference. There are pictures on the walls up the back stairs and on each landing now that are exclusively residents' work. It makes the presence of residents tangible and leaves a note about people who have lived here. It lends a history.

The staff acknowledged that the arts program contributed to the hostel's atmosphere. They were amazed by the range and number of people involved. The staff's feelings of cynicism and isolation changed. Before the program, there was a sharp divide and sometimes adversarial relationship between the staff and residents. After the arts program's inception, staff and residents sorted out violent incidents together. The other dramatic change has been in the reputation of the hostel. The nature of the work is much more demanding than in other Look Ahead hostels, due to the higher percentage of people entering directly from a life on the streets. In spite of this, the hostel has a more positive atmosphere and, in turn, attracts good staff.

The program also offered an opportunity for artists to learn about their own working approach. By being able to interact with people outside their day-to-day settings, many were able to extend their practice and adapt their aesthetic approach. Artists in the program had this to say:

> The first week I was quite apprehensive; then I realized they were just like me.

> I had some surprises. Like the woman who did the collage on the traffic-cone tables. First I didn't realize what she was doing. But it looked great. It was good with people experimenting.

> [The furniture workshop] gave people an opportunity to all be together and show strength and even a heroic quality. Cutting wood and drilling gave people a real pride in using their strength. It gave people a chance to use their authority, too, in working out how best to organize.

A business supporter commented that he and his staff had learned from having a positive, creative point of contact with the hostel. They had a reason to talk with each other and the residents in a way that overcame stereotypes. People saw the residents' art and realized that they were not just drunks but talented people. They learned not to assume anything and to see that they had common ground. As a business leader, he realized, "If we are isolated from each other, nothing gets done. We just blame each other. The launch made people more aware we could do a great deal in that community. There was more opportunity to explore what we could do together for the benefit of both. The staff can get involved without it being an isolated event."

The Arts Program and One Mile East

In March 1996, the arts program was extended to the area surrounding the hostel. This wider initiative, called "One Mile East," has been the catalyst for a growing number of commissions, workshops, and partnerships in the neighborhood. For the first time, a housing association was the prime mover of a large-scale initiative to regenerate the area around one of its properties.

As a first step, Look Ahead sought the cooperation of neighboring organizations. For example, maintenance responsibilities for artwork commissioned for a dingy railway bridge needed the cooperation of both the rail owners and the local authority. Look Ahead also sought the collaboration of a locally based national bank to ease access to resources and influence. One Mile East has made a visible difference to the area. For residents participating in the program, the results have ranged from simple enjoyment to offers of work.

Children from the primary school located at the rear of the hostel participated in One Mile East. The teachers had needed a lot of reassurance before getting involved. They feared that if the children got to know residents, they might be in danger if they met them alone on the street. Their fear was not exaggerated, as previously objects had been thrown from the hostel onto the playground and racist comments had been shouted at the children. After negotiations, some of the artists took the children outside to sketch. They asked the children how they would like the area to look. This research fed into subjects during the school day and a mural the children produced on a nearby billboard. Parents, children, teachers, and artists celebrated together. Some of the talented young residents of the hostel also took part. The teachers acknowledged that it had been a long time since they had felt the school was part of a community.

Because the program was so compelling and involved so many different parties, stereotypes began to overturn. The local government manager admitted that colleagues in the authority resented anyone trying to improve the locale. However, she was motivated to get involved because she recognized that solutions can be found only in partnerships.

Funders learned to think differently about what might be possible in other settings. A grants and policy adviser was intrigued by the way the momentum for involvement in the program developed. She had an opportunity to see the results of her initial modest grant grow in possibility.

A colleague in housing found a source of inspiration for some challenges she was facing in her own hostels. After initial skepticism, she has become one of the arts program's biggest advocates. She realized how dreary most institutions are—an indictment of the housing industry. She acknowledged a bias that public money has to be spent on functional, utilitarian housing, although it costs no more to make hostels attractive and may be cheaper in the long run.

© Tamar Arnon

Student from Shapla Primary School with her artwork for a mural in a nearby underpass.

Emerging Themes

It is difficult to measure the impact of the arts program. However, the consensus is that the arts have made big differences, evident in the following themes:

Change. From the outset, it was assumed the arts program would challenge accepted ways of working at Look Ahead, the hostel, and the head office. The support of the chief executive was vital during these periods of chaos when procedures needed to be worked out. Stark mentored both TC Arts and Look Ahead staff members.

Cynicism. Staff and residents had assumed that any art in the hostel would be destroyed. This has not happened. When there is deliberate damage in the building, it is usually where there is no art. The arts program has also allowed staff and board members to reconnect with the reasons they do their jobs in the first place and has renewed their sense of pride in their work.

. . . the importance of changing the tenor of each day and giving a sense of purpose . . . is invaluable.

Cynicism often resulted from previous experiences or cultural background. When asked if he had preconceptions about the arts program, one staff member replied: "I'm working class; I thought art was just for posh people. I was quite cynical about it at first. The experience here has completely changed my view of arts projects, and for an old dinosaur philistine like me, that's something." The program is also providing policy makers and funders with evidence of the impact of art on some interconnected issues of homelessness. That evidence helps them overcome skeptical colleagues and interdepartmental obstacles.

Day-to-day differences. Everyone recognized that art did not suddenly solve all problems, and some residents still have great difficulties. Some individuals still come into the hostel and deteriorate in the daunting environment. However, the importance of changing the tenor of each day and giving a sense of purpose, albeit transitory, is invaluable.

Self-worth. Everyone touched by the program, residents, staff, and private-sector committee members, learned about their own potential. Participants in the workshops had a tangible sense of achievement. Some individuals worked with the children from the school, demonstrating that they had something to offer others, with unquestioning acceptance and curiosity. Participation encouraged self-reliance and trust at all levels.

Consultation process. The seriousness with which Carey and Arnon took the consultation process gained everyone's respect and helped to build an atmosphere of cooperation. They were seen as fearless, and their different styles as complementary. They were felt to be from the outside world, removed from the problems and more institutional relationships of residents and staff, and at the same time bringing a sense of care, affection, and flair to the hostel.

Celebration, continuity, and history. Residents' work displayed in the hostel and the visible aspects of the program provided points of reference for a sense of continuity and progress in an otherwise chaotic and immediate environment. The special event evenings and day trips reinforced the sense of the hostel as a community and provided a shared history for residents, staff, and visitors. These events and the arts program as a whole also gave a celebratory reason for visitors to come to the hostel and for ex-residents to maintain contact and continuity of relationships with the hostel.

Links to the world. Links with organizations and projects outside the hostel were valuable for breaking down an institutional culture. These links not only opened up real opportunities for broadening the residents' experiences, but allowed both residents and others to measure themselves against real-world standards. The workshops gave the artists an opportunity to reexamine attitudes to their own work and test their approach in a rigorous setting.

Social capital. The One Mile East project has helped change neighbors' prejudices about the hostel and has also given many different kinds of people a way to contribute to the wider world beyond their immediate activities. It has helped to knit the hostel and Look Ahead into the local neighborhood and into London's wider priorities for regeneration. The presence of local children in the hostel generated a feeling of connection and normal life. In exchange, the children enjoyed doing the mural, and their teachers felt part of the community through its execution.

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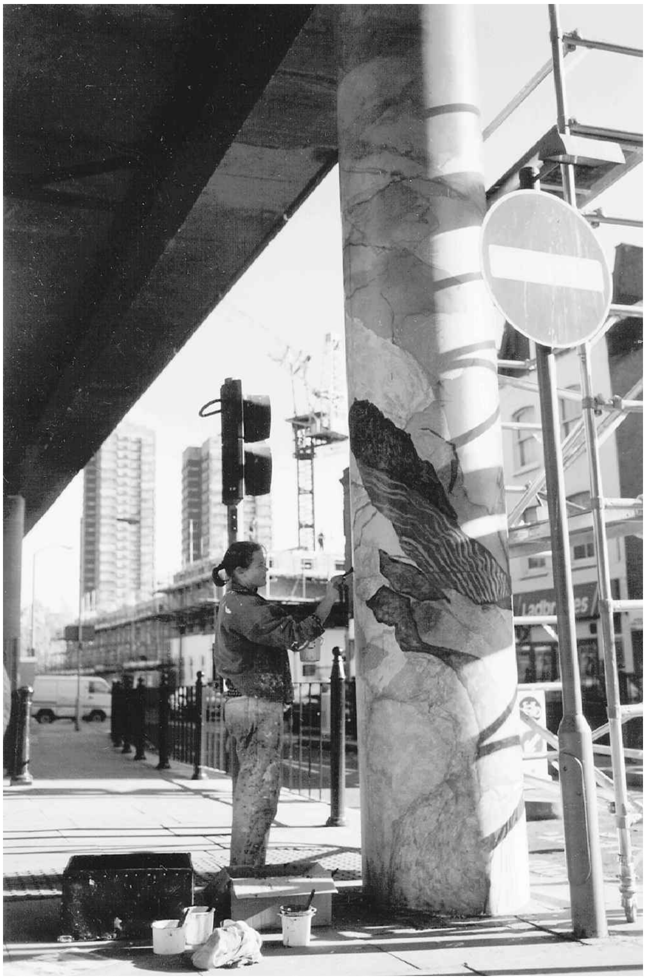


Artist Zoe Benbow working on a public art commission as part of One Mile East.

Contributions. A board member was surprised by how quickly private-sector staff grasped the long-term benefits of the program and noted, "They are doing it because they genuinely like doing it. They make lots of time available because it is so much more enjoyable than anything else they are doing." For funders, the program provides an inspirational project that is delivering on a small scale what they are seeking to do on a larger scale.

Leadership

At first glance, there may seem to be an element of magic to the success of the arts at Aldgate Hostel. Magic is certainly there. However, on closer examination, it becomes clear that this success is based on visionary leadership—a proven approach to managing complex change. Understanding this factor makes it possible for other managers who wish to replicate the successes of the arts program to be innovative in how they approach the arts. Replication is not about mimicking, but rather about learning from the Aldgate experience how to tackle challenges in another setting. How can the arts encourage organizations to learn and stimulate learning in their neighborhood and beyond?

The vital leadership steps in initiating a program of this kind are:

- Identify a challenge or opportunity.
- Develop a vision for what you want to do.
- Enroll others in the vision and give them the autonomy to implement it.
- Manage the creative tension between the vision and the reality.
- Share the glory.

The Nature of the Art

The quality of work commissioned and undertaken in workshops is paramount. The experience of quality transcends job descriptions and social status and generates hope. The possibility of constant surprise is essential. Arts programs cannot be doled out routinely. An element of mystery has to be at the center, rather than an instrumental, didactic, or historical approach. People respond instinctively to artistic quality, even if they don't share a specific aesthetic. Controversial art at least provokes a discussion about aesthetics, rather than problems.

An arts program gives everyone the opportunity to move beyond standard approaches to problems, to revise job descriptions, and to maintain connections with people on a human level. It can facilitate a shift to team-based working practice, again a proven management approach for generating creativity, innovation, and increased effectiveness. If art is seen as only an add-on activity for keeping people amused or the place pretty, it will lose its effect.

With the success of One Mile East, the arts program has precipitated a change in Look Ahead's perception of its role from a housing provider to a catalyst for change and inclusion in the neighborhood. The hostel has moved from being a liability to becoming a resource, not only for residents and staff, but for neighbors, artists, and policymakers. Social exclusion is not just an issue for those at the lower end of the economic and social scale; it concerns all those who find themselves excluded at the wealthier end, through distance, privilege, prejudice, or overwork. The arts program overcame some barriers to understanding the real obstacles to social inclusivity and took the first steps to more genuine social cohesion.

The arts program has also changed perceptions about the role of an arts coordinator. When Carey and Arnon began working with Look Ahead, they were contractors, delivering a specific service. Within six months, they had become key collaborators with the Look Ahead team, not just delivering a joint vision for the hostel, but stretching and expanding it. Their exceptionally successful work laid the foundations for extending the arts program across all Look Ahead's hostels. As a result, Look Ahead has appointed an arts manager to coordinate the program at its other hostels.

People respond instinctively to artistic quality, even if they don't share a specific aesthetic.

Replication of this story is both easy and difficult. The key is to resist the temptation to seek the same outcomes quickly by simply mimicking the program. The story of art at Aldgate clearly argues against taking this route. Rather, it shows the effectiveness of learning from past experience and other examples, followed by equal investment in risk and subsequent reflection. Only in this way will an arts program be best adapted to the environment it seeks to enliven.

A housing association does not have to be sure of the art it seeks to commission, but it does need to be sure of the vision it has for social housing. By committing itself and its staff to provide residents with the same stimulating, welcoming, and cared-for environment most of us create in our homes, housing associations lay the groundwork for the successful replication of this arts story. The outcomes will be similar; the paths will vary.

FEATURE

Learning, not Logos—A New Dialogue between Arts and Business

Julia Rowntree

Simon MaggsÊ

Julia Rowntree
Director
London International Festival of Theatre Business Arts Forum

For the past 13 years, I have worked to gain financial and other forms of support for the contemporary arts, most notably for the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). My main focus has been securing support from the private sector. This search has taken me on an interesting journey—one that opens up possibilities for how the arts and particularly contemporary theater and festivals can stimulate new ways of knowing the world that are illuminating for all, including those people who work to create wealth. It is also a route to finding a way to sustain contemporary arts organizations in the new economy: global, wired, and largely privatized. Rather than providing any clear destination, my own journey may provide signposts and coaching stops for others who feel that the arts are not just entertainment or a badge of status, but a fundamental aspect of understanding the world.

Since 1981, LIFT has brought more than 4,000 artists from over 60 countries to London to stage their work in theaters, parks, churches, on the River Thames, and in surprising locations around the city. We choose productions because they take the form of theater into a new realm or they say something particularly interesting about the culture from which they come. When the festival began, London audiences found it sufficiently interesting simply to see performances from elsewhere. Now the world has changed fundamentally, and in response, the festival links international artists and the people of London, now thought to be the world's most culturally diverse city. We do this via our education program, which brings international artists and young people together to produce their own events in the festival. Our mission is to provide an opportunity for artists from around the world and the people of London to celebrate and explore together what makes the world tick.

The festival, which happens every two years, allows us, at the beginning, to start with a blank sheet of paper and ask ourselves: Why are we doing this? What are we for? The new chapter in my particular story started with a crisis and indeed an exploration of what I myself was for. For ten years, my job had been to raise money for the festival from the private sector. In the climate of Britain in the eighties, when market values were in the ascendancy, I was up against a few obstacles. The festival is a highly developmental operation; we found it harder and harder to attract commercial sponsorship for our activities. We did not have a Royal patron (nor did we particularly want one) and were not the first choice for corporate entertainment. Productions were sometimes critical of the political regimes of the countries from which they came, so businesses were not eager to be allied with such artists. In spite of this, and against all the odds, our sponsorship record was highly successful, representing around 13% of our overall budget.

However, in 1993, two things happened in one month that were to change my life. Barings' Bank, one of the oldest merchant banks in Britain and our longest-term supporter, crashed, and the sponsor of our education program pulled out. After ten years of raising money for the arts, I found everything falling apart in my hands. I was thrown into a personal crisis and needed to answer some fundamental questions.

I had to think very hard about my own role and value. As a language graduate, I had always been an interpreter between cultures of one kind or another. I had to find a way of speaking that would allow a completely different conversation to happen with people in the private sector. However, I discovered that not only did I need a new conversation, I needed a new language and conversation with people completely different from those with whom I was used to engaging.

My mind buzzed with questions as I set out to discover anew what was the role of the arts as I saw them, with no direct commercial application. Why would business be interested in young people exploring their potential and abilities? What was the value of encountering worlds other than your own? What was the role of celebration for our times? What was the role of the artist who questions accepted ways of doing things? What was the value of cultural activities in the public domain? What was the value of the public domain in a largely privatized world?

I couldn't throw light on these issues by just talking to artists; we were all talking about the same things. Since my particular focus had been the business community, I needed to talk to business people. They were different, though, from the people I usually dealt with in the arts and community affairs departments of organizations. Through no fault of their own, they were low in the corporate hierarchy and could talk only about the size of the company logo or the amount of press coverage their sponsorship was generating. Whatever their stated community policy, their measures of success were marketing measures. We knew this was the situation for arts organizations and entered willingly into these contracts. However, I felt there were much more interesting conversations to be had. I had to find ways to engage in discussion with other individuals who were asking their own questions.

I began to discover that business people hungered to embark on different kinds of conversation beyond the boundaries of their own organizations. They had a desire to engage with the arts in a search for new language and new metaphors. There were even people who were asking very long-term questions such as, "What is business for?"

[People] had a desire to engage with the arts in a search for new language and new metaphors.

However, the challenge for business people was to find the time to engage with the arts outside their work environments. Often they were lone voices in their organizations. Their in-trays were full, the pressures of producing financial targets so great, that colleagues saw conversation with people in the arts as irrelevant. They had difficulty finding time to spend with their families, let alone embarking on other conversations or going to the theater. My challenge was formalizing a way for people to engage with the festival. I was determined that the conversation would be naturally stimulated by what we were presenting anyway in the festival.

One of our advisers, writer and broadcaster Charles Handy, came up with an incredibly simple way to do this. He said, "Let's invite people to attend events in the festival, and then we'll talk about their experience. Artists should be part of the discussion. Then people can hear what the artists had in mind when they were putting the show together. They can ask how they got it off the ground and worked together."

After a long period of research, advice, and support from many quarters, this idea has now become the LIFT Business Arts Forum. Practically speaking, this is a linked series of seminars and performances in the festival that brings together people from the arts and private and public sectors to develop insights into how the world works. The overarching question we pose to people is: What did you learn from LIFT events, their creation and management? What would you do differently in your work as a result?

The first year of the forum, in LIFT 1995, we tested whether people in business could gain insights from the festival. They did indeed. Talks ranged from raw discussions of race to the role of emotions in business. Participants commented:

> Businesses are obsessed with order and stability, but they are steeped in emotion.

> Turbulence, confusion, things not being immediately obvious need not represent a threat, but something we can react to in a positive sense.

To be innovative, we need to break down conventional categorization.

I've learned you have to listen to a minority view, even if you don't like it.

Ironically, given my starting point, an accountant who had been involved in Barings' Bank after the crash said, "All the financial regulations in the world are worth nothing if you don't understand the cultural complexity in which they are set." LIFT can't solve that precisely, but through its international and local program, it can sensitize people to just how complicated culture is—culture that goes beyond nationality, of course, to include culture of ethnicity, department, organization, class, and gender.

The forum provides space for contrarian views and experimentation. Artists too feel a greater sense of connection. Instead of just conversing with their usual audiences, they gain a more acute view of their role in society by extending whom they speak to. At LIFT, we have learned a great deal about our own organization and the wider world, via the forum. It has built an outstanding network of thinkers and advisers for our work. At a financial level, the forum generates income to support one entire production in the festival.

So why is getting the business and arts worlds to think differently about each other worth pursuing and why is it timely? During periods of huge uncertainty, such as we all face, there are no ready-made solutions. This applies to all organizations and policymakers, in whatever sector they operate. The demands on leaders are changing as a result. Our success will depend on a readiness of mind and openness of attitude, and a certain humility to admit what we don't even know we don't know. The more organizations are in tune with a changing external environment, the more they are likely to adapt and flourish. The forum can develop many of those attitudes.

. . . why is getting the business and arts worlds to think differently about each other worth pursuing . . . ?

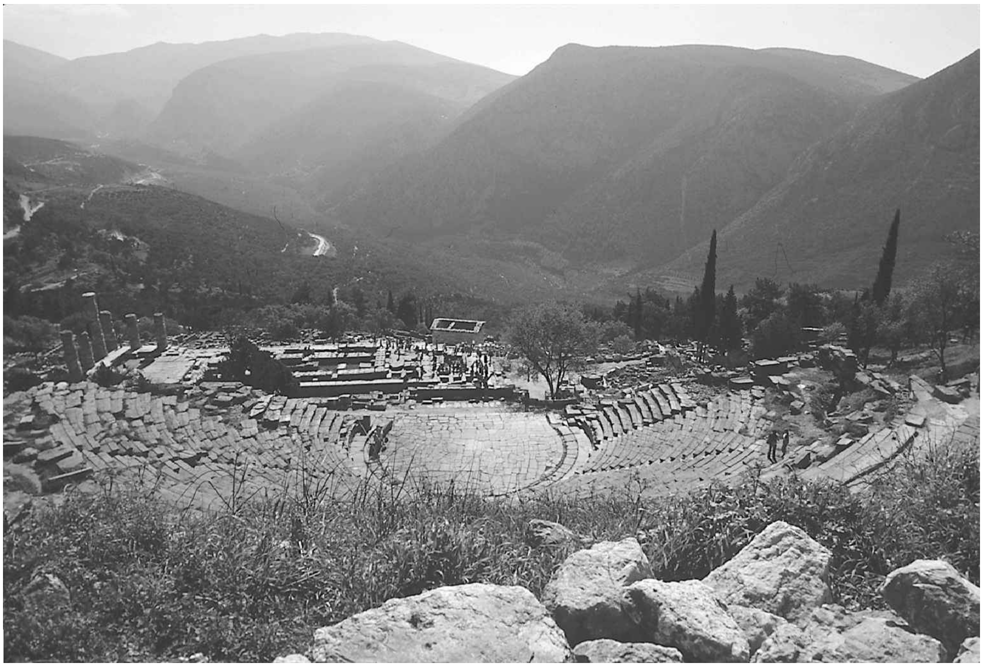
The venture brings people out of their familiar organizational settings, helping them to develop a "helicopter view": seeing how they fit into the wider social, economic, and value context both locally and globally. The forum helps develop the strength to withstand sometimes lonely and frustrating circumstances within the inevitable sluggishness of institutions. 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.

There is another reason for renewed interest in the ways that artists of different cultures think and work. As we move from a manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy, wealth creation is no longer determined by physical objects moving over physical geography. Completely different cognitive processes are needed to explore new routes to wealth creation. Former director of Xerox PARC, John Seely Brown, commented: "All innovation is aesthetic. It comes from the white spaces between fields, when we put people together who have quite different points of view." The forum provides access to artists' thought processes and an opportunity to reflect on the social processes that increasingly will be the source of wealth creation.

The forum is useful at another level. The global economy runs closely with global flows of information. News of corporate behavior travels fast; markets are increasingly value driven. Businesses have to take stock of public opinion and face issues that have perhaps been simpler or less public in the past. How does an individual within a company make sense of all this?

Sometimes an outside view and access to the very whole vocabulary of the theater is the place to look. The forum has the potential to explore the complex ethical and cultural issues in which we are all implicated, whether producer or consumer. When the power of technology means that you can do more or less anything, the question for business is: What do we choose to do? I suggest that business people cannot solve this question on their own. They need people of other disciplines with whom to reflect.

Artists also need to know more about the processes shaping our lives in order to do their jobs better. In a privatized world, power has shifted from the old social hierarchies and government to the private sector. With power comes responsibility. Artists have al-



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ways had a relationship with those in power. This relationship has not been solely one of patronage, but has also encompassed an examination of power and responsibility, its paradoxes and dilemmas.

As for artists, what is their motivation for involvement in a new kind of discourse with business when they are clearly not directly concerned with the profitability of business? In an increasingly privatized world, where the ideologies of socialism and capitalism have more or less merged, our lives are more and more determined by the dominant culture of capitalism. This will not be determined by political ideology, but by the aggregate of the myriad management, participation, and consumer decisions we all take. These interactions constitute the culture of capitalism we are creating together. We need time to reflect on this and a place of trust in which to do it. I believe that the LIFT Business Arts Forum is one way to start that conversation. Perhaps it is a reinvention of the traditional role of the theater as a place to think, see, and feel the world differently and see the world through the eyes of others.

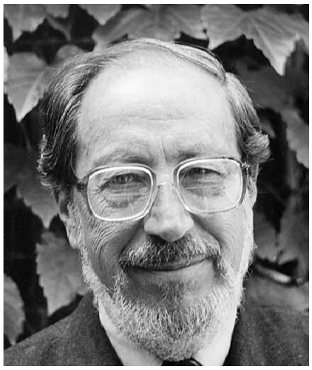
Leading
Following
A circle.
Where did we begin?

Nancy J. Adler and Lew Yung-Chien

Painting By Nancy J. Adler
The Banff Centre for the Arts, 2001

The Role of Art and the Artist

Edgar H. Schein



Edgar H. Schein
MIT Sloan School of Management

Why is art relevant to other elements of society like business or government? Why should managers learn anything about art and the role of the artist? I have thought about this for years and have recently formulated some thoughts. I preface this short essay by noting that I have not done "research" in this area. Rather, I come at this from a personal point of view, both as a lifetime sketcher and as a clinician interested in seeing how artistic activity has affected my life and the lives of others with whom I have worked. The several "functions" of art and artists that I will describe below overlap and interact. I separate them to highlight the variety of functions that can be identified, once we reflect on this topic.

First, art and artists stimulate us to see more, hear more, and experience more of what is going on within us and around us.

As part of their training, artists expand their perceptual and expressive range. One of their key roles, then, is to help the rest of us see more, to broaden our perspectives, and to get in touch with both internal and external forces that we might otherwise not notice. This point applies particularly to the visual arts, but is probably also a factor in musical composition and performance arts. I suspect that composers and actors, like painters and sculptors, have to learn to see and hear before they can create. Many of the exercises through which artists learn how to "see" better are highly applicable to human situations we mismanage because we have not learned to see what is actually going on.

Second, art does and should disturb, provoke, shock, and inspire.

It is in the nature of culture formation that we seek stability and predictability in our environment. We all live in safe cocoons created by our occupation, social class, ethnicity, religion, group memberships, and family. These cocoons determine our perceptions and what we consider to be appropriate things to see and think.

Art and the artist communicate directly with elements of our unconscious and thereby encourage us to broaden the range of perceptions and feelings that we allow ourselves. Art should and does force us to look at what we normally avoid because it is disturbing, anxiety provoking, politically incorrect. Art focuses squarely on precisely those things that are forbidden in our daily discourse. It is often the only medium in which societal hypocrisy can be exposed because we can rationalize art as being "only art," not reality. Yet that is precisely why art is needed and is potentially so powerful.

Third, the artist can stimulate us to broaden our skills, our behavioral repertory, and our flexibility of response.

Through legitimizing and stimulating improvisation, the artist, particularly the performing artist, can help us to overcome "knee jerk" reactions and old habits. Many of our habits are stable because we have never thought about alternatives or taken the risk of trying them. It is surprising once we are seduced into trying some improvisation exercises how liberating and educational this experience can be. In a similar vein, to the extent that art shocks or stimulates, it allows us to surface feelings that we may not have been aware of in ourselves. Incorporating those feelings into our emotional repertory and acting on them makes us richer and more flexible human beings.

Fourth, the role of the arts and artists is to stimulate and legitimize our own aesthetic sense.

We talk about "beautiful" plays on the football field, or the "beauty" of a sales plan, or the "beauty" of an intervention that a consultant made, but we don't talk about or consider what it is that makes it beautiful. We don't really analyze or reflect upon the aesthetic dimension partly because we do not have any conceptual tools or principles to draw on. The artist can teach us what the elements of beauty are and legitimize the importance of beauty in all elements of our lives.

Fifth, analysis of how the artist is trained and works can produce important insights into what is needed to perform and what it means to lead and manage.

By analyzing the skills that underlie different art forms, one can gain insight into what is needed to perform in general. For example, the painter is not only dependent on a creative muse to tell him or her what would be worth rendering on a canvas. He or she needs specific knowledge and skills such as color theory, drawing skill, ability to see clearly what is to be rendered, theory of perspective, eye-hand coordination, and the capacity to draw on her or his own emotional and unconscious self. A poet needs to have a large vocabulary and a sense of how to put words together, including an ear for rhyming, if that is part of the poetic expression. A composer of music needs to be able to manage the technical skills of composition as well as be able to play relevant instruments.

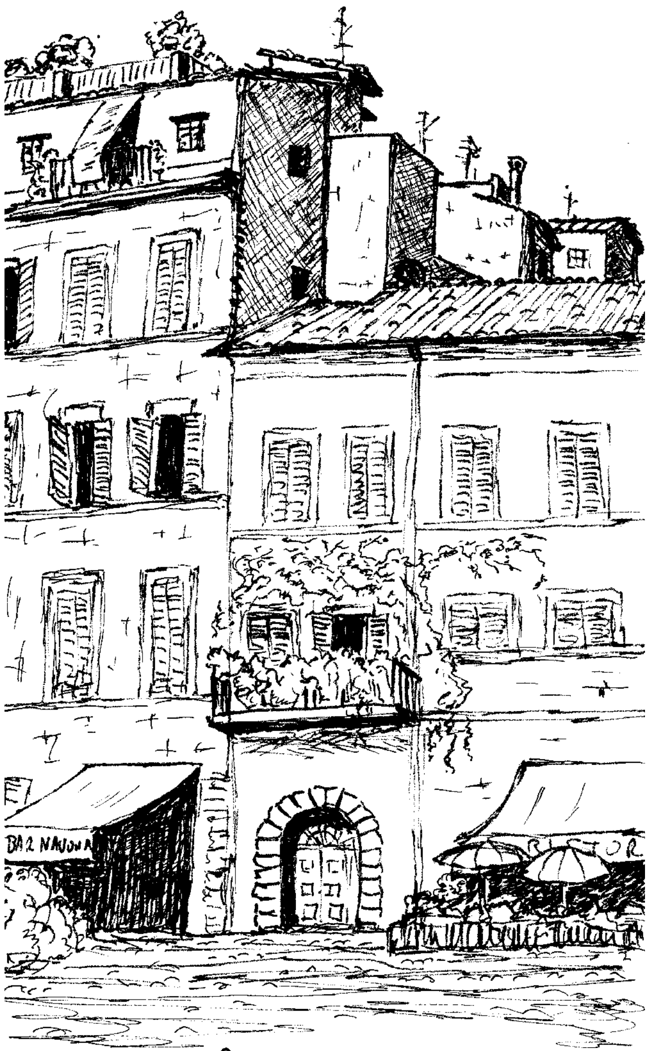
When we move to the performing arts such as orchestras, string quartets, and jazz bands, we encounter a whole other set of skills such as the ability to read music, to play the instrument competently, to relate to the other performers and the conductor, and, most importantly, the ability to improvise.

The ability to improvise creatively is perhaps the most relevant of these skills in terms of applicability to organizations because the performance of leaders and managers is not as scripted as musical performance is. Leaders, managers, and organizers are more like composers who write a score for others to perform. Team members create the performance from their reading of the score, their interaction with each other, and the signals they get from their leaders, customers, and subordinates. Because they have to respond to so many often conflicting signals and cues, improvisation becomes all the more necessary.

Improvisation in a team is, of course, much more complicated than individual improvisation such as individual performing artists, teachers, and consultants engage in. In order for the team to perform well, each member thinks in terms of delivering a line that will enable another member to get off a good line, rather than thinking of a good line for him or herself. In business, consulting, teaching, sales, and other interactive professions, one realizes if one is at all reflective that improvisation is the major performance element in all of these occupations.

Sixth, and most important of all, the artist puts us in touch with our creative self.

By emphasizing creativity as an intrinsic aspect of all reality, the artist invites us to look at reality in a different way; reality is not out there to be seen and appreciated. Rather, reality is perpetually constructed through our own daily creative activities. Or perhaps a better way to put this is to say that the important part of reality, the part that matters, is the part that we create for ourselves through those activities that we own and in which we express ourselves.



PIAZZA NAVONA E. SCHEIN

I am reminded of a story from the Korean POW camps in which the prisoners were only allowed occasional recreation by floating on a raft in the river abutting the camp. One of the highlights of these outings was to play a joke on the guards. It was forbidden to leave the rafts, but invariably a prisoner would "fall" into the water causing the guards to rush over to pull him out, at which point another prisoner on the other side of the raft would "fall" into the water, and so on. In the same vein, assembly-line workers are notorious for their ability to creatively invent systems and procedures that defeat some of management's goals.

The artistic is with us all the time, but if we do not pay more attention to the role of art and the artist in our society, we run the risk of not noticing how much more effective and happy we might be if we allowed the artist within ourselves to emerge more explicitly and consciously!