

Aesthetic Intelligence

What the 'World of Business' Can Learn from the 'World of the Arts'

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I am not a businessman, I am an artist.

Warren Buffett

Abstract

Aesthetic Intelligence

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Successful leaders are those able to master the power of 'high touch' in a 'high tech' world and over the past decade or so, organizations and business schools have turned to arts-based learning to cultivate this capacity. Based on decades of experience and empirical research, we have looked beyond the accessible methods and metaphors of the arts, and peeled back the outer layers to reveal the underpinnings of the artistic mindset, which defines its culture. In doing so, we have identified a capacity we call, *Aesthetic Intelligence*, a capacity that when integrated into the fabric of organizational life, informs strategy and process, and holds the potential to energize leadership and organizational performance. Presence, Authenticity, and Synthesis are the fundamental elements of Aesthetic Intelligence. Aesthetically Intelligent people are engaged in their work, intrinsically driven, acutely aware, emotionally intelligent. An Aesthetically Intelligent organization embodies, encourages and executes the collective energy of its members. This article expands on the emergent field of Organizational Aesthetics, illuminates Aesthetic Intelligence, and suggests how one can bring an artist's sensibility to their work.

Aesthetic Intelligence

What the 'World of Business' Can Learn from the 'World of the Arts'

Why Aesthetic Intelligence?

We are global and ruled by technology, and with progress has come regression. We have literally lost touch with each other. Our senses have dulled and our business results have suffered. It is time to rethink our approach to self, our work, and our organizations. It is time to reconceive the future, not just replicate the past.

Aesthetic Intelligence (AI) is a powerful capacity with the potential to reignite your senses and leadership. When embedded and part of your organization's cultural DNA, Aesthetic Intelligence will be evident in people, product, and process. We contend the 'world of the arts' thrives on this expansive capacity and that this approach offers the 'world of business' a fresh lens to invigorate your organization's Design, Performance and Impact. At the end of this article, you will be ready to take the first steps to cultivate AI.

So What!

If you Google the terms - - - organizational leadership, culture and alignment - - - over three-quarter of a million citations will pop up for your review. This is an astounding number, and evidence of how important these topics are to business leaders across functions and at every level. One of the driving reasons for the vast numbers of these resources is that although business leaders may not yet know the *answer* on how to assure high performance, they do know the consequences. Creating a culture of high performance, effective leadership, and sustainable alignment is not only important - - - it is critical, and when absent, performance is compromised, and profits erode.

We have not met a client organization of any size or industry that does not covet a high performance culture where:

- Team play is a given, and everyone has their eye on the same prize,
- Feedback is ongoing and embedded,
- Experimentation is welcomed, not punished,
- Individuals passionately and proudly invest 100% of their energy and focus every day,
- Pride and playfulness, compromise and competency, self-interest and collaboration, and structure and freedom stand side by side,
- And where these enviable attributes are implicit, not promoted with team buildings, pep rallies, town halls, road shows, mission statement plaques, and laminated cards.

This culture is not imaginary, not a fantasy. This coveted culture describes the culture of the performing arts: a world where ego, competition, self-direction, and individuality aptly describe the players; respect, connection, and dependency, describe how they play.

Can you afford to ignore what the culture of the ‘world of the arts’ offers the ‘world of business’?

The Culture of the ‘World of Performing Arts’

There is no doubt the typical world of the arts is different from the typical business enterprise. However, we contend that to achieve and sustain success both must master the creative process of performance to achieve and sustain success.

We also realize many of us associate the term, *aesthetic* with ‘beauty’, and in the business world, the word *aesthetic*, may be disarming, stirring notions of something not rational or concrete, and therefore not useful. The Greek and European derivation of the term, *aesthetic*, suggests it refers to a sense of perception, the utility of our senses. This definition

informs the context for how we use *aesthetic* in this article. We will illuminate the power of our senses - - - what we see, hear, touch, smell, feel, and intuit. Our senses are the way we consume and distinguish our experience and environment, ways that have increasingly atrophied compromising people and financial performance.

Bridging the world of the arts and the world of business is an emergent relationship. Over the past decade or so, arts-based learning has cracked the door open in business schools (Babson, Stamford, Wharton, Harvard, NYU, UCLA, Columbia, McGill, Copenhagen, Essex,) and organizations (Google, Unilever, IBM, Morgan Stanley, McGraw Hill, Wachovia, P&G) across the globe. Centers for excellence have surfaced in Canada, UK, and Denmark.

Artistic metaphors and methods have been employed to dramatize culture, instigate imagination, enhance teamwork, and challenge the traditional model of leadership. However, much of the work to date has focused on a specific artistic method, such as improvisation to foster innovation, or roles and characterizations illuminating parallels between a typical performing artist and business leader. The arts have long been a source to teach presentation and media skills, and more recently served up models for enhancing customer experiences. Although these approaches have enriched the people and places they have touched, they embody a piecemeal approach, similar to taking a team out for a rock climb, or to brave the rapids and as such, their value is poised to being reduced to a fad, trend, or flavor of the month. This type of rub off experience falls short of internalized cognitive and behavioral culture change.

Based on decades of experience and empirical research, we have looked beyond the accessible methods and metaphors of the arts, and peeled back the outer layers to reveal the underpinnings of the artistic mindset, which defines its culture. In doing so, we have identified a

capacity we call, Aesthetic Intelligence. This capacity is driven intrinsically and expressed externally and when integrated into the fabric of organizational life informs strategy and process, and holds the potential to energize leadership and organizational performance.

A Capacity for an Approach, not a Methodology

The pace of change continues to be relentless. Organizations will succeed or fail NOT by their ability for rapid response in an environment bombarded with stimulation, but by their ability for the BEST rapid response. This demands being able to absorb, assimilate, associate, and act appropriately - - - the capacity to be *present*, to be *authentic*, and to *synthesize*. These fundamental elements define Aesthetic Intelligence, the capacity to bring an artist's sensibility to leading and running your business.

It is our intention that you will come to see that *Aesthetically Intelligent* people are competent, fully engaged in their work, acutely aware, and emotionally intelligent; and that an *Aesthetically Intelligent* organization embodies, encourages, and executes the collective energy and focus of its members.

Elements of AI: Presence, Authenticity, Synthesis

As we distinguish Presence, Authenticity, and Synthesis, we will also pose questions for reflection.

Presence (being conscious of self, others, and environment; capacity to be available to engage, to accidents, to the unexpected)

Presence, 'being present', demands that we are able to shift the inner place from which we operate immediately and in real-time. *Presence* has been, and remains a cultural norm of the world of the arts, and the artists who reside there.

An artist cannot stray from the moment. During rehearsal and in performance, an artist must stay in character, closely attuned to people and events around them. A lapse in attention can result in cascading mishaps. The fear of failing others by dropping the ball, weighs heavily on artists. Remaining present is essential, and seems equally critical for the worker in an environment that lauds collaboration and is characterized by fluctuation and interruption.

So, what stops us from being present? We are trapped by categories, premature cognitions, a victim of our own social constructs that causes us to automatically label experience and act from a single perspective. We cling to what we have been told or are used to, and these images become photographs where meaning is frozen rather than fluid[1].

How many of us grew up thinking *tuna fish salad* was it: the idea of *bluefish* or *swordfish* salad never occurred to us. Perhaps we squirmed the first time we saw someone eat mustard with French Fries, or ketchup on eggs, if that was an unfamiliar practice. In a similar fashion, we respond mindlessly to our environment and daily actions: robotically cooking a frequent recipe, going on autopilot driving to work, or tackling daily tasks.

We operate by default, become rote in our behaviors and attitudes: *Here she goes again, that is just the way she is; It won't work here! It's not practical!* We assign stereotypes to strangers of color, religion, and ethnicity. Our minds become lazy; our opinions immovable. We follow scripts, instead of having present-centered interactions. We stop thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, being.

To become present is to heighten our senses, which in turn produces creative tension, challenging the mundane, setting the stage for novel, flexible, and timely responses. With this renewed sensory awareness, a conversation that leaves a 'bad taste in our mouth', the

‘claustrophobic’ feeling we get upon entering an office, or the ‘energy’ we feel after an inspirational talk, becomes a source of knowledge and action for self and others.

Presence goes beyond the words we and others think and say. Presence demands attention to movement, and movement often determines status. Take a moment and reflect on the various meetings you attend (staff, workshop, senior staff, etc.), the room, and participants. With that picture in mind, note that where one positions themselves and how one uses their physical body suggests whether they choose to be close or distant. How we use our body can declare who is up, down, confident, tentative, desirable, or to be avoided. Every movement of the body modifies its surrounding space, and the experience of everyone inside that space, causing ripple effects in conversation and relationships.

Presence is invaluable in a workplace where creativity and innovation is imperative. Bill Breen, editor of Fast Company states: “Creativity – these days, there’s hardly a mission statement that doesn’t herald it, or a CEO who doesn’t laud it. And yet despite all of the attention that business creativity has won over the past few years, maddeningly little is known about day-to-day innovation in the workplace. Where do breakthrough ideas come from? What kind of work environment allows them to flourish? What can leaders do to sustain the stimulants to creativity and break through the barriers?” [2]

No doubt, presence as a cultural underpinning of the arts sets the stage for dynamic interaction, deliberate sensemaking, and emergent unfolding. However powerful these methods serve as a catalyst to creative thinking, we suggest that embedding a culture of creativity and innovation cannot be accomplished in isolation. The demands that confront organizations today are NOT events - - - and therefore cannot be addressed by special sessions of mingling with the arts and artists, anymore than dipping a toe into Six Sigma creates a culture of quality.

Internalizing new ways of being, thinking, and doing are required in this innovative economy and we believe that Aesthetic Intelligence serves as a prerequisite to creating a work environment where creativity, collaboration, engagement, trust, strong interdependent networks, and innovation flourish.

To be present is to optimize all of our senses. Being present allows us to distinguish what we experience and choose our responses. In a time when much is unknown and unforeseeable, heightened presence makes the difference between acting with intention in context or responding reactively.

What premature cognitions limit your view?

When was the last time you asked a question you did not know the answer to?

What does your movement say about you and others?

Authenticity (shaping and presenting yourself in sync with time, topic, intention, and audience)

Artists begin their process by deeply understanding what they bring to a given piece of work, and the influence that will bear on their performance. They seek to get inside the character, the meaning behind the script, score, or movement. They draw on their experiences. They guard against over stating, or compromising the author's intent.

One actor plays many different characters. One musician participates in a range of symphonies. A dancer moves to a variety of choreography. And for each role, the individual must bring himself *authentically* and deliver the performance *authentically* for their audience, using their vast reservoir of personal experiences and then morphing his or her skill sets appropriately.

Authenticity is a popular topic amongst leadership pundits. Unfortunately, much of the dialogue has been misleading, absent the critical conversation on role and characterization appropriateness. To be authentic, is not just to be who you are, warts and all, with an attitude that screams, or whispers, 'tough', regardless of circumstance. Rather, it is about clarity of intention, and drawing on oneself to deliver on that intention.

Think of the wide range of interactions and relationships you have each day: peer, manager, leader, member. Amongst these roles, you will be asked to facilitate, report, influence, respond. Striving for authenticity forces you to reflect on how you need to be experienced, heard, seen - - - and paves the way for you to act with intention to deliver appropriately for each situation. It is a moment of choice and you must be believable. To be authentic builds on being present, identifying intentions, and assuming the role required to achieve the objective at stake at that time, at that place, with that audience. Authenticity communicates "truth to the teller, audience, story, and mission"[3]. To be or not to be authentic is not the question; it is the answer.

It takes practice and rehearsal is one powerful means to learn how to enhance authenticity. Not rehearsal in the colloquial way we may think of it as an intense preparation time before opening night - - - but rather as cultivating a daily habit of reflection on our activities. *Did that meeting go well? Did that conversation yield the intended results or a surprise? What worked and did not work? Was I present? When did I respond reactively, from a default position? What would I do differently if I could rewind the tape? What did I learn about myself, and others, because of that interaction?* Answers to these and other questions deepen self-awareness and inform future interactions.

One of the great prevailing myths in the workplace is that our time is actually planned. In truth, our day is a series of interruptions and surprises. The best-laid plans give way to spontaneous conversations, debate, and decision-making. Unanticipated external influences demand adaptation. Simply, we are improvising much more than most of us realize. Rehearsal offers an ongoing process of continuous improvement, iterative actions of observation and reflection, strengthening our ability to be authentic with intention even in the midst of unpredictable events. Rehearsal makes for “disciplined practitioners” [4] whether you are a performing artist or a business leader.

To be in an organization is to always be interacting, implicitly and explicitly. Authentic performance integrates the highest levels of knowing and feeling, scripting and improvisation, in order to bring meaning, message, and connection to our roles and our work relationships.

Are you clear about your various roles and their characterizations?

Are you believable?

Does your intention connect with your conversations?

Synthesizing (weaving seemingly disparate experiences from the cognitive, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and spatial in order to inform thought and action)

Michael Spencer, musician, consultant, and educator states: “Musicians tend to be concerned with the ‘properties’ of what they are listening to when performing on the concert platform, all of it very much to do with creating a sense of good ensemble - - to avoid coming in too early, too late, etc. Conversely, business people focus on the ‘content’, the ‘analysis’ of what they are listening to” [5].

For the musician, listening is not the work of ‘one’ sense, but all the senses - - - sight, touch, taste, feel, hear - - - and the indefinable and undeniable sixth sense. Listening is a

dynamic, visceral experience, offering a potent combination of sensibilities. The performing artist and the high performance businessperson are both masters of synthesis.

Consider.....

An automobile begins with disparate pieces of metal. Designer couture is shaped from materials of various colors and textures. An Oscar winning film results from the expert synthesis of snippets into a cohesive and coherent whole. A work of art is a vision coming to life as the palette is dramatically splashed on canvas.

Groundbreaking products are born out of fresh eyes looking to solve common problems. Kodak's flash. Pampers. Swifter. Post It Notes. Facebook. Jogging baby carriages. Flex Time. Hot cup holders. TIVO. Velcro. iPhone.

Few of us could imagine life without remote controls, computers, cell phones, and email. Some products change all our lives.

Some business models influence divergent industries: Dell's just- in- time inventory, Southwest's low cost air travel, Lands' End distribution, and Enterprise's door-to-door service.

If you think these examples are about creativity, you would be only partially correct. They are about synthesizing new and established ideas in order to be creative and produce groundbreaking ideas, products, and processes. A synthesizer sees underlying patterns and associations beneath the surface. Synthesis opens a doorway to being creative, generation, which in turns paves the way towards innovation, execution.

The notion of a *creative class* culture, may be a novel concept for business, but has existed in the arts for centuries [6]. The Renaissance was witness to theatrical cities, emergent theatre communities set apart, erected on the margins of major cities, which came to be known

as a *spectacular society*. These peripheral cultures embodied a cohesion of social, artistic, and political inputs, characterized by a convergence (synthesis) of ideas.

The MacDowell Colony is a 450-acre retreat in rural New England and has served as a creative refuge to over 550 artists of various disciplines since 1907. Designed to respect the creative process, attendees have time and space to interact in an environment free from distractions, where mingling promotes sharing. Since its onset, MacDowell Colony alumni have won more than 65 Pulitzers, 12 MacArthur Foundation “genius awards” and, claimed scores of Academy Awards, Grammy’s Guggenheims, and National Book Awards [7]. This kind of success cannot be ignored.

Let’s do the math. Synthesis is a catalyst for creativity; creativity is a catalyst for innovation. Innovation equals growth and economic gain. Talented people must be nurtured and educated. Conclusion - - - to achieve growth, any entity (region, company, institution) must be a place where talented and creative people want to be, a place that provides the infrastructure for learning and cultivates and welcomes diverse ideas and people. There is a reason why 98% of two year olds consider themselves to be creative, and only 2% of twenty-five year olds hold onto that claim - - - and the reason is not their potential, but the external environment that suffocates the natural bias for curiosity, play, and exploration [8]. Unfortunately, our natural bias for creativity is stifled and atrophies over time producing adults that are afraid to think, unimaginative, and often intimidated by the unknown or different. It takes a stubborn person to remain an artist in a society that values conformity, and it will take the same courage and tenacity of organizations to create a culture where adults can reconnect with their innate artistic capacities.

The late economist Mancur Olson noted that the decline of nations and regions is a product of an organizational and cultural hardening of the arteries he called “institutional sclerosis”[6]. Unblocking those arteries flows directly from innovation, which flows from creativity, which flows from synthesis, which flows from presence and authenticity.

There are no universal magic bullets or fairy dust. The roadmap is both clear and complex. Big business, educational, and research institutions have their work carved out for them and clearly, the artistic community has a good deal of experience to offer.

Can you afford to ignore what the culture of the ‘world of the arts’ offers the ‘world of business’?

Are you analyzing or synthesizing?

Does your organization’s culture invite collaboration from diverse sources?

Can you think of yourself as a business artist?

Embedding Aesthetic Intelligence

The potential of Aesthetic Intelligence will depend on the how well it is integrated throughout the organization. The Aesthetic Organization graphic (figure 1.1) provides you an idea of how an organization informed by Aesthetic Intelligence unfolds, from design and performance to impact. The graphic illuminates the traditional and innovative systemic elements, which must be aligned and integrated to create a culture of AI. The Aesthetic Repertoire (figure 1.2) identifies the possible methods, tools and applications of an AI organization. This section brings a few of these graphic elements to life with discussion and examples.

Alignment

Whether a new scene, or a new way of working, embedding requires proactive alignment of interrelated people, parts, and process. Like a pebble tossed into a pond, a change in any one element will cause ripple effects elsewhere. Lack of alignment anywhere in the system compromises performance.

We have seen how an ensemble is a dynamic integration of performers in a production, tapping the inherent energy and skills of members and demanding each individual is aware of how his or her work aligns with fellow actors, dancers, or musicians. An ensemble, like a business organization is a system, a group of interdependent elements forming a complex whole, a condition of harmonious, orderly interaction. Performance is the culmination of those shared efforts. Business organizations, like ensembles are creating an experience, striving for rave reviews, connecting design with performance, developing performance for impact.

As we offer the following organizational possibilities we encourage you keep in mind that alignment is indeed effortful, and that one size does not fit all.

Power of Founding Culture and Values

Culture is the energy that moves people to act. Culture is a key input that defines how an organization works. An aesthetically intelligent organization mirrors the culture of the world of arts, a space of possibilities where trust is given before earned, uncertainty is certain, protocol is clear, competency valued, and interdependency is a constant.

It might surprise you that according to a 2004 Fast Company assessment, the most creative company in the U.S. across product and process was W.L Gore & Associates, a privately held organization, best known for Gore-Tex fabrics, Glide dental floss and Elixir guitar strings. W.L. Gore employs over 6300 people and sells over 1000 products. Since its inception in 1958, it has enjoyed double-digit annual revenue growth. No easy feat.

It is not likely that founding father Bill Gore was explicitly applying aesthetic intelligence to his decisions; however, his decisions embody AI and provide an initial platform to better understand AI in action.

Intuitively Gore knew “improvising ensembles are the purest form of group genius” and that “innovation is inefficient, not time bound.” [9] To this end, each facility houses up to 200 people, a mix of R&D, Marketing, Sales, and Finance folks. There are no fancy labs. Entire teams work together. Roles blend. Ideas are not ghettoized. People pursue ideas on their own, connect with one another, and collaborate out of self-motivation rather than obligation. The gems of this kind of collaboration reside in the moment-to-moment interactional dynamics, and Gore’s organizational design intentionally optimizes this interaction.

Paradoxically, most organizations attempt to control innovation. Gore knew better. Creativity does not happen in response to time pressures or deadlines. Creativity requires an incubation period, time to let ideas soak and bubble up. The elixir guitar strings were two years in the making discovered by accident when an employee was on holiday fishing.

Gore strove to heighten meaningfulness and diminish fear. He knew competition encourages fear, stalls communication, and hinders creativity. At Gore, there is minimal hierarchy, and few titles. There are no bosses, rather a ‘starting sponsor’. Your team is your ‘boss’, because you do not want to let them down. You become a leader by leading, getting followers. You attract other talented people, by drawing them with your passion for what you’re working on and credibility gained over time.

Gore wanted an organization that did not wait for a crisis to discard the rules, so he mimicked the artist’s world, and dramatically altered the typical corporate relationship between

failure and risk, celebrating failure with champagne. Retooling and learning from mistakes became a routine process.

Gore knew that money was not a motivator, but easily could become a distraction, reinforcing risk adverse employees. To counter this, compensation at Gore is tied to your contribution, which is decided by a committee of peers. Although a private company, every associate is rewarded with stock, equivalent of 15% of salary in form of stock.

W.L.Gore is a campus of inconspicuous buildings (simple surroundings define the artist's world) nestled off a country road in Delaware, thousands of physical miles from Silicon Valley and further in mindset from Wall Street. W.L. Gore is doing something almost magical - - - fostering ongoing, consistent, breakthrough creativity and innovation. Indeed, a spectacular 'peripheral' society.

Artful Conversation

Language is the conduit of our work, the words we use to say what we think and what we think reflects our experience: where we have been, what we have been taught, and what we know. Language can be used for communication, to share information or for conversation, to generate connection. More than ever, our ability to connect effectively is suffering under the convenience and immediacy of technology. We fool ourselves that communication is sufficient, and that its ease and frequency will suffice. In truth, communication often fails, damaging relationships and performance. Great performances require great connections.

An organization informed by AI is characterized by an artistic mindset, and when there exists an artistic mindset, there follows artful conversation, characterized by presence, authenticity, and synthesis. Artful Conversation deepens and expands meaningful connection. .

Artful conversation takes time and effort. Time to listen. Time to hear. Time to explore. Time to attend to the power of the 93%. Consider that 55% of our message is communicated by the physical body, 38% by paralinguistic (voice quality, tone, pace, volume), and a mere 7% of messaging communicated by our actual words. Clearly, electronic communication cannot suffice.

Artful conversation is emergent and begins with deep listening. Instead of preparing our response, we are *present*, absorbing the complete landscape: self, others, movement, tone, surroundings. Probing decodes the true message, encouraging present and authentic response, in lieu of automatic responses.

Artful Conversation can make the difference between whether our conversation creates camaraderie or conflict; progress or regression; connection or abandonment. It is time to replace communication that is distant, incomplete, and often fearful with artful conversation. Artful conversation engages people's hearts as well as their minds, and focuses on interactions (employee, customer, stakeholder, and shareholder) while delivering desired results. *What kind of conversations are you are having?*

Engagement

Unfortunately the colloquial expression, 'people are our most valuable asset', is often more rhetoric than action. But for the Aesthetic Organization, nothing could be more true - - - engaged employees is a lucrative outcome.

An estimated 11-14% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs[10]. These "employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company"[11]. These employees exert discretionary effort. The remaining 85% or so are actively disengaged, or sleepwalking through their workday putting time, but not passion into their work. You do not

need to be a mathematician to know that employee disengagement leaves a lot of money on the table.

Some companies recognize that engaged people are their most valuable asset and have taken strategic actions to ensure they buck the trend. One company is SAS, the largest privately held software company and in 2004 reported twenty-eight straight years of revenue growth. SAS has made Fortune's list of the twenty best places to work every year, enjoys an enviable 3-5% employee turnover rate compared with an industry average of nearly 20% and boasts an astounding 98% client subscription renewal rate.

SAS has designed a culture that revolves around employee engagement, and like the world of the arts, optimizes employee's discretionary effort. Developers at SAS thrive on intellectual stimulation, so SAS generously sends them to industry and technology specific conferences so they return energized to share their learnings with others. SAS conducts extensive employee surveys to identify and eliminate distractions which otherwise would hamper productivity. Work/Life balance is supported by an onsite medical facility, day care, basketball court, swimming pool, and gym. A corporate concierge helps employees manage daily necessities such as car wash, haircut appointments and dry cleaning. Children are encouraged to join parents at mealtime in the corporate cafeteria. Employees have flexible start and end schedules to accommodate personal lives and are granted extra days off to attend school functions.

At first glance, this costs quite a bit of money, and the majority of organizations do not replicate SAS. But, when you run the numbers, SAS saves 85 million dollars a year in recruitment of new employees because of their employee retention. And this does not even calculate the ROI gained by internal employee promotion and accumulated intellectual capital.

SAS is truly a corporate ecosystem where creativity and productivity flourish, profitability and flexibility go hand in hand, and where hard work and work/life balance aren't mutually exclusive.

Leadership

Embedding AI requires leadership. Here again, business leaders have much to learn from leaders in the performing arts.

Susan Booth, Artistic Director of the Alliance Theatre, recipient of the Tony Award for Best Regional Theatre in 2007 explains: "A director prepares for the conversation with the audience, harvests all the voices in the room and knows how to stand behind the cast and audience and not between"[12].

The best directors are 'present', watching, listening, and expressing what is happening before them. He or she trusts the talent around them, and collects what each person brings. They give actors space to explore and own their characters; balance their need for control with empowerment, know when to get involved and when to stand back.

Directors create a positive work environment, where everybody gets to talk and everybody's ideas are honored and considered. People are allowed to make mistakes. A rehearsal is an exploration not an exam. Mistakes are a given.

The most important thing a director does is cast the play. If you have a great play and cast the wrong people, the play will likely fall flat. In contrast, even a poor play may come alive with the right cast. After casting, a director recognizes that different actors need different things from them, and adopt their interactions and guidance accordingly.

A director is a synthesizer, a sensemaker, a sculptor, who sees emergent patterns from the collective process. He or she is the eyes and ears of the group, representing their interests

with others back stage. The success of directors is determined by their ability to coordinate these multiple players and create a cohesive performance.

The adjectives that describe a good director, are exactly the same adjectives we would use to describe the model leader. A good director embodies Aesthetic Intelligence and creates an Aesthetically Intelligent environment and serves as a source of insight and inspiration for great leadership in any venue.

Reconceptions

To reconceive is to build on what is known and create something new, and often more valuable. The process proves liberating, free from conformance. Typical business organizations are characterized by replication, a process which looks to a “blueprint, a planned description of what the outcome should be.[13]”

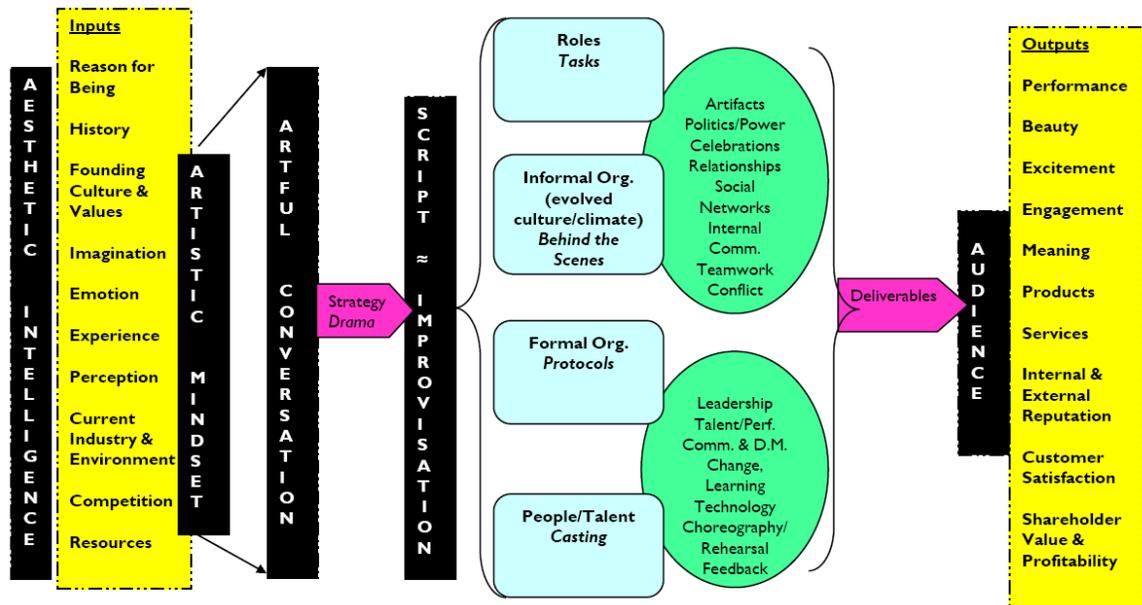
Performing artists approach their work with an assumption of what can be, not what is. An actor once casted will study the character he or she will play, but will enter rehearsal understanding those notions will morph as the ensemble weaves their words and movements to tell a story. The operative question framing this experience is, “What could be?” In contrast, business players often come to meetings and decision-making with an end in mind that they are willing to defend and fight for. The operative statement framing this experience is, “What should be!” This type of response, deeply rooted in most organizations, is inconsistent and unsuccessful in a fast paced, competitive environment where the game and the players are always changing. We have relinquished our capacity for individual thought and action, and by doing so, minimized the optimal performance of our organizations. It is time to reclaim the full force of our senses and potential.

Being Aesthetically Intelligent allows us to reconceive our roles and explore new questions. To create possibility where there has been closure. To form cohesion where there has been disparity. When we look at the 'what, how, and why' of what we do in business with Aesthetic Intelligence, another opportunity is at our fingertips.

Can you afford to ignore what the culture of the 'world of the arts' offers the 'world of business'?

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.
Marcel Proust

Aesthetic Organization



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Figure 1.1

Aesthetic Repertoire



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Figure 1.2

Business as Performance Art™

Exploring Relationships between Passion, People, and Performance

(July 2007)

by

Rochelle T. Mucha Ph.D.

This study builds on the growing body of knowledge of organizational aesthetics. I worked with two regional theatres in Atlanta, Georgia: The Jewish Theatre of the South and Alliance Theatre to learn what business organizations could learn from theatre ensembles/companies to strengthen systems alignment and high performance. I maintained a systems perspective, considering the entire entity, its organizational interdependent elements, remaining mindful of how these elements interact.

The data was collected employing two qualitative methods. I observed rehearsals from the first *meet and greet* to opening night, the experiences of actors and technicians in their natural setting to discover, understand, and describe the factors that work together to make for performance success. I conducted fifteen face-to-face interviews with actors, directors, producers and technical staff to learn the implicit and explicit characteristics of theatre, and theatre members that enable them to successfully align around a common goal, the performance. I followed with a thematic analysis of the data and the analysis revealed insight into four dominant themes: engagement, culture, theatre roles and protocols and alignment.

My findings resonated with current literature, however new insights were added. The difference between theatre and typical business cultures is dramatic, and ultimately, it is culture, which inhibits engagement and alignment in business. However, my study concludes a focus on talent identification and management, as the critical take away for business and reinforces that when people are doing something they love, are good at, and are rewarded for, an environment of collaboration, trust, flexibility, accountability, creativity, experimentation, candor, and fun, can prevail.

About the Author



Rochelle T. Mucha, Ph.D.

Rochelle T. Mucha Ph.D. is founder of **Business as Performance Art™** an Organizational Consulting company that focuses on Strategic Leadership, Learning, and Change, helping organizations and their members be more effective. Rochelle engages with individuals at all levels of an organization to assess and support sustainable improvement.

Whenever companies integrate the outcomes of work across disparate business functions, they too perform theatre - - creating a rhythm and choreographing roles front and back stage. Any lack of alignment anywhere in the system diminishes the output: product, service, shareholder value, and/or credibility of the enterprise. **Business as Performance Art™** is not a cookie cutter model, but rather a perspective, a framework for organizations to reflect on, individualize, and use to create their own stellar performances. An organization's success is dependent on the *Talent* and *Attitude* of its employees.

Rochelle is a Registered Organization Development Consultant (RODC) certified by the Organization Development Institute, a strategic partner with CoachSource and WJM Associates, and has served as a leadership coach and adjunct faculty for the Terry College of Business at University of Georgia. She retains adjunct faculty status for the Coles College of Business (Kennesaw University), Mercer University, and several virtual Business Schools. As a member of AACORN (Arts, Aesthetics, Creativity Organization and Research Network), Rochelle offers a unique expertise in the emergent field of Organizational Aesthetics.

Prior to establishing her own consulting business, Rochelle served as Regional Director of Training for Marriott Corporation and was affiliated with several global management-consulting firms. Rochelle is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University and Fielding Graduate University.

Rochelle's interactive style complements her role as coach, speaker, and facilitator. Rochelle brings broad business experience across functional lines and the benefit of a perspective learned from being both an internal and external associate.

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