



**It's Not Industries That Are Creative, It's People....**

**By Ralph Kerle©**



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As Innovation Coach in the Leadership Development Programme at the Banff Centre, Canada, I had the opportunity to observe and work with senior executives of some of North America's major corporations while they explored new ways of thinking about business values, opportunities and problems by immersing themselves in an environment of creative and art-based action learning exercises.

The experience of their struggle to find new perspectives or ways of thinking about business was not new for me. As a former Drama graduate without any formal business education, I started and owned for 14 years a highly successful event company that designed and delivered corporate events as a means of marketing, communicating and driving business goals and objectives. This business was shaped by the way I reflected creatively on how my company operated and the product and services it sold and delivered. The fundamental question though of how I valued the output of these creative services and those of my employees was essential to the viability and growth of the business and a lot harder to describe and measure.

My clients were not buying nuts and bolts. They were buying intangibles in the form of knowledge and experience that produced creative ideas and the company's ability to be able to effectively and economically implement them. The clients could not know the outcome of the service we provided until it had been delivered and it was often months afterwards before they could arbitrarily come to some conclusions about the success or failure of their investment.

How could I place a value on the service I was providing? How could I value the input of my employees and my suppliers as they worked creatively to deliver the service that was in the process of being created? How might my clients understand the creative process so they could assess the value of what my company was providing and the value their company was receiving?

How can a business built on knowledge creation survive and plan for growth if it currently doesn't have a meaningful way of describing and valuing itself and its services?

### **An Historical Perspective.**

Most businesses and certainly governments and statisticians use words such as productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness to define and describe the popular notion of "value" in organizations and industry.

These words relate historically to tools of production and instruments of measurement that, in the main, were ways of evaluating and measuring value that were introduced in the Industrial Age. They were vital drivers for progress in the Industrial Age in that they provided ways of understanding and controlling our physical world, which have led to great advances in our standard of living.

The last two decades has been marked by the emergence of industries driven by knowledge and people rather than machines and production lines. There is a vital need for a set of values expressed by a different language: one that can describe business as moved by its prime asset, its people.



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Peter Drucker, the father of the science of modern management captured the essence of this need in an article in Forbes Magazine<sup>1</sup> in 1998 in which he suggested the basic assumptions about the economy – that business and technology underpin theories of modern management are hopelessly out of date. He argues that our basic assumptions about business reality are derived from the paradigms of social science. The assumptions and the language inherent in these assumptions are what sets the agenda and what management will focus on at any given time. This agenda determines what is pushed aside and what is regarded as the exception. Most importantly, he proposes that if our assumptions are wrong then everything else that follows will be wrong.

He references the work of Mary Parker Follett<sup>2</sup> author of the contemporarily titled *Creative Experience*<sup>3</sup> published in 1924 and a pioneer in the field of management and organizational studies in the 1930s, when management as a discipline was emerging. Follett wrote about the importance of organizations functioning on the principle of power "with" and not power "over." She advocated the principle of integration and "power sharing." Her assumption was that managing for increased yield was the priority in any business and that could best be achieved through better understanding among employees. Her proposed methodology was the surfacing of conflict to create and facilitate understanding in the workplace.

Her theories were ignored at the time because she was out of synch with the prevailing assumptions on two scores. The Marxist experiment of undermining the bosses authority in order to build a society free of exploitation was the prevailing labour agenda. Whilst business, on the other hand, believed cost cutting was the essence of good management. Looking at Follett's work some 80 years on, it's possible to see how insightful her ideas were with regard to society, people and management in comparison with the theorists and practitioners who ignored her work at the time. From the 70's onward, management again ignored the humanist approach and instead listened to the propagandists of information technology as they promised through the wonders of computer software, reductions in labour and increased efficiencies and productivity in almost all work endeavors.

Staffed by an alliance between computer scientists and multi-media artists<sup>4</sup> charged with writing computer code to conceptualize a brave new world, this technology boom harnessed the agenda with a steady stream of vital new business breakthroughs that promised the paperless workplace longer leisure hours and reduced costs. All assumptions that offered business quick increases in value. History shows the reality

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Drucker, Management's New Paradigms Forbes Magazine Oct 5, 1998

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-foll.htm#creative> – background on Mary Parker Follett.

<sup>3</sup> An extract from Creative Experience... Experience is the power-house where purposes and will, thought and ideals, are being generated. I am not of course denying that the main process of life is that of testing, verifying, comparing. To compare and to select is always the process of education. . . When you get to a situation it becomes what it was plus you; you are responding to the situation plus yourself, that is, to the relation between it and yourself... Life is not a movie for us; you can never watch life because you are always *in* life... [T]he 'progressive integrations,' the ceaseless interweavings of new specific respondings, is the whole forward moving of existence; there is no adventure for those who stand at the counters of life and match samples.

<sup>4</sup> See Rich Gold unpublished novel The Plenitude on (PAIR) the Artists In Residence programme he established for Xerox at the Palo Alto Research Centre at <http://www.o-art.org/Plenitude/>



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and validity of these claims to be very different. Statistics show that 90% of the world's information is still on paper and that employees spend up to 150 hours per week looking for misplaced information<sup>5</sup>. In the mid 90's, the dot.com bust emphasized the difference between the hyperbole of information technology's assumptions and the actuality of what it delivered. The first part of 21st century has seen management sift through the debris of the dot.com era seeking tentatively for emerging agendas that might provide more enlightened and authentic ways of defining business and its values.

### Recent Conversations

Lotte Darso, Research Director of the Creative Alliance, the Learning Lab, Denmark in her ground-breaking book *Artful Creation – Tales of Art in Business* argues that the importance of this search for a new language, a new way of viewing business in terminology is immense. But she suggests organizations are too busy with "business as usual" to really take the matter seriously: "When knowledge and competencies become the main asset, the real value of organizations is no longer material products controlled by business but knowledge in peoples' heads and bodies"<sup>6</sup>. She proposes that product innovation is still important. However, at least 50% of innovation is social and concerns new ways of collaboration, new constellations (involving new types of people) and new processes of learning and knowledge creation. The assumptions that drive the design and sale of information technology are based on Industrial Age notions that suggest accurate measurement is in the end the only valid means of assessing value.

Johnson and Broms in *Profit Beyond Measure* argue that organizations have separated the ends (financial targets and performance objectives) from the means (the process and practices used to create them). Ends have come to seem more concrete, more "real" and therefore more valuable than means. They argue the task of managers is to stop treating results as a target one reaches by aiming better. Instead results are outcomes that emerge spontaneously from mastering practices that harmonize with patterns inherent in the system itself, In other words, manage the means, not the results. "Means are ends in the making"<sup>7</sup>. The critical question being posed for business that is operating at such speeds and in such complex and unpredictable ways unimaginable in the Industrial Age, is how to make sense of the means. Can we find a way of defining the processes of knowledge production and reveal its value?

"For a business person, the numbers are the measure of success. If we don't have the numbers, that's the end of the conversation. But if we don't have the conversations that's the end of the numbers. It's a paradox ... You need to look at how alive the organization is, how people interact and talk with each other - their relationships. That is a key part of the value-producing capacity of an organization. It's very difficult for people to measure that, since the only tool they have to measure is the number".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Fundamentals of Information Management  
<http://www.thetechzone.com/?m=show&id=103>

<sup>6</sup> Artful Creation Tales of Art In Business Chapter 2 Page 27

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, H. and Broms, A. Profit Beyond Measure New York Free Press 2000

<sup>8</sup> The World Café by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs BK Press 2005 Perspectives and Objectives...Page 31 It's A Win-Win All the Way: Sanofi-Synthelabo, Yvon Bastien



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Knowledge cannot be controlled – we cannot control the how and when of the production of knowledge – who knows where it is going to come from, from whom, how, and when? These are the unknowns. What we can do is set up the environment for knowledge to be encouraged, discussed, recognized, and then valued. Recent case studies involving substantial international organizations suggest creative processes in the form of immersive action may hold the key to understanding how insight capable of producing knowledge that leads to value, can be created and produced at a fundamental organizational level.

### **The BBC**

*Inside Story* by the former Director General of the BBC (2000-2004) Greg Dyke is an autobiographical study of the design and implementation of the major organizational transformation of the BBC. It is a compelling example of the successful use of a combination of creative thinking processes predominantly built around the art of story telling to refresh, reinvigorate and apply a new set of values to its prime asset - the creative skills of its employees. The British Government appointed Greg Dyke as Director-General of the BBC in January 2000 to revitalize the sagging morale of one of Britain's icon institutions. The world's largest public broadcaster with 28,000 employees spread across a vast media network of TV, Radio and Internet had been through a period of internal cost cutting and restructuring. Morale was low and employees so protective of their respective areas of responsibility that important internal decision making had almost ceased to exist.

In his first public statement, Dykes provided a clear direction when he announced under the theme of "One BBC", his priorities for change were aimed at "putting audiences, creativity and programme making back at the heart of the BBC"<sup>9</sup>. An important early recognition by Dykes was that in previous attempts to bring about change in the BBC, external consultants had been used and on all occasions, they had failed to make any lasting impressions. The organization was internal looking and hierarchical in the way of traditional public service organizations. Outsiders trying to bring about change in an organization with this type of ecology and a staff of 28,000 had an impossible task. If the mission was to succeed, he rightly reasoned only internal staff could be involved in the process.

Dykes commissioned research on the BBC and discovered the concerns within the organization centered around a lack of clear vision by Executive Management as to where the BBC was headed. It was perceived by staff that there was little connection between what Executive Management said and their behaviour. The trust between departments was extremely low and as a result collaboration almost impossible. If the BBC was to be moved, the mandarins within the organization known internally as "Bafta Bastards" had to be challenged, involved, and moved outside of their privileged positions of power or by-passed. In 2002, Dykes launched a culture change project entitled "Making It Happen"<sup>10</sup> with the stated mission of making the BBC the most creative organization in the world within five years.

The framework Dyke used to initiate this change programme involved the BBC's 400 Executive Managers in a major story telling exercise built around the theme of discovery designed to tease out and surface the positive organizational attributes and

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<sup>9</sup> Full excerpt at

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/dyke\\_makingithappen.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/dyke_makingithappen.shtml)

<sup>10</sup> Also see [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/dyke\\_makingithappen.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/dyke_makingithappen.shtml)



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values within the BBC. The process used to facilitate this meeting was "appreciative inquiry", a methodology based on aesthetic discourse developed by Dr. David L. Cooperrider of the Weatherwood School of Management at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Cooperrider describes appreciative inquiry as being about the "co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them". In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives 'life' to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms." It is built on the 4 principles of discovery, dream, design and destiny and is a technique that involves the mobilization of inquiry through the crafting of the "unconditional positive question" - often involving hundreds or sometimes thousands of people. Cooperrider proposes that appreciative inquiry seeks to:

fundamentally, build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul-- and visions of valued and possible futures<sup>11</sup>.

And that is exactly what happened. The Executive Managers unleashed so many remarkable stories and reflections on past glories that it became almost impossible to stop the gush and with this gush, came the instant affirmation that the main value of the BBC was "creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation". Unequivocally, creative programme making is what made the BBC what it was, is and should be. The "unconditional positive questions" applied to this statement produced a clear statement of organizational values and actions. Dyke's next communication to the 28,000 employees re-enforced the importance of the transformational programme theme "Make It Happen" and its implied meaning. Teams at any level within the organization were delegated to quickly implement ideas recognized by an individual team as having value regardless. The organization previously strangled by the language of bureaucracy was then less constrained.

Small creative initiatives started to appear throughout the organization. Language classes were offered at Bush House for all staff of the World Service and Global News; a creative pairing initiative to develop and pitch new creative programming making ideas was implemented at Birmingham, an undercover initiative to unearth new writing talent within the entire BBC commenced; meetings in Radio and Music were opened to all staff; mentoring schemes were instigated within Television News and Sport, a network of audience champions was established for News and cultural studies were offered in the Documentary and Factual Commentary areas. Policy and Legal were recognized for the excellent work they had done in making the Communications Bill workable for BBC programme makers and staff. Factual Learning established watering holes to speed up their contribution to the Value Creation Process and Connecting with Communities had provided a way for individuals and teams from within the BBC to volunteer their time in an innovative and meaningful way to outside organizations or activities.

## **The World Bank**

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<sup>11</sup> <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm>



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Another example of the power of story-telling to transform is contained in Australian Stephen Denning's book *The Springboard - How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*. The former Programme Director of Knowledge Management of the World Bank, commences his story with a sense of disappointment at being informed he is to be moved from his glamorous jet setting life as a World Bank manager of operations consulting to heads of state to an internally focused role solving the problems within the World Bank information management system whose budget is spiraling out of control. Denning discovers quickly that the issue of solving the information management systems problem has been researched and reported on by audit teams at least three times between 1988 and 1993 and in 1995, three times in the one year. The reports all have three things in common. They all identified the unresolved organizational problems that were affecting the ability to be able to solve the problems. They all refrained from recommending any comprehensive solutions. Denning suggests this was due to bureaucratic inertia and territorial defensiveness. Thirdly, the outcome in each case was identical - do another study!

The World Bank information management systems had supported and paralleled the bank's evolution from a traditional financial institution with a specific role of transferring money to poor third world countries for development projects to a co-ordinator of financial transactions in these countries; and then as a catalyst or promoter of additional financial services to a knowledge broker transferring information and know-how to people and organizations on how to get results in these third world countries. From this historical perspective, Denning intuited that the problem he had been asked to solve was the wrong one. The World Bank was never ever really going to change as an organization if it concentrated on solving its information management system using the traditional management methods of re-engineering through staff rationalization and reducing overheads and costs. Rather he believed there was a real business opportunity in knowledge and knowledge sharing internally and externally that could transform the World Bank's entire business model.

Denning highlights how his strategy to win over and involve management and colleagues in this massive transformational undertaking began with an unusual story about the value of knowledge. His story involves a Zambian health worker forced to work in conditions where access to knowledge and information on health care was as impossible to find as the delivery of the care itself. Frustrated and depressed at his inability to make a difference in one of the poorest countries in the world plagued by a malaria epidemic, the Zambian worker in desperation locates a computer to research malaria treatments. He finds the Centers for Disease Control site and there stumbles on an answer to a vital question he had been seeking.

What Denning did with this story was to use it as a metaphor to demonstrate to his colleagues the power to imagine and act to make a genuine difference. He would begin his ever increasing number of presentations to members of the bureaucracy of the World Bank with the Zambia health story. When he did this rather than regurgitate the findings of the audit reports, the response he received changed from what can we do to how can we make it happen. Denning theorises that what he calls "springboard stories" have the power to increase an audiences understanding of how an organization or community or complex system can change.

## **World Cafe**



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*The World Café* by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs focuses on the use of the process of facilitated conversations, another form of storytelling, that is gaining popularity in business and organizations in strategy design. The purpose of the World Café technique is to facilitate a dialogue around issues through sharing and recording mutual knowledge. Its value lies in the way it creates networks of conversation that can quickly catalyze an organization's or community's collective intelligence around vital questions or issues. The use of the metaphor of a café is deliberate in that Brown and Isaacs believe that work environments support "conversations as a core process, a fundamental means by which relationships are built, knowledge is shared and value is created". Story-telling as a method of producing knowledge in a business sense is successful because it is a natural occurring phenomena in every day life. It is the prime form of human communication and its narratives provide social cohesion and assistance in establishing our values and value systems. We are practiced at telling stories all day every day

Yet storytelling in its many guises is only one dimension in a broad range of arts based processes that stimulate and facilitate powerful aesthetic discourses around sense making and complexity - the environment in which business operates daily.

### **Banff Centre**

Whilst working in the Leading Change Through Innovation programme at the Banff Centre, I observed The President of the National Library Association of Canada attempting to redefine the role and value of libraries in contemporary society; the Director of Emergency Services of one of the largest energy producers in the world wrestling with a national prioritization system for the production of energy in Western Canada in the event of a catastrophe; two senior executives from one of Canada's leading freight and distribution companies searching for new ways of dealing with a small group of intransigent unions inside their distribution system who were severely hampering their ability to compete in a deregulated market. And in a conflict between ancient and modern civilizations, the General Manager of Canada's largest diamond mining company, an indigenous Canadian, was being confronted by land-right issues that involved his own tribe and was being forced to negotiate with his Council of Elders lead by his father, who was demanding more royalties or no mining.

The processes these executives explored to seek new insights to their powerful opportunities and concerns included creative writing and journaling, music appreciation, visualization, theatrical plays and improvisations and the study of the natural ecological of the Rockies as well as storytelling - all underpinned by a theoretical oration of creativity. These subjects are the domain of the social sciences not the world of business.

### **The Aesthetic of the Business Artist**

Why is discourse emerging as a new way of exploring business values and language? Steven Taylor and Hans Hansen in their paper "Finding Form: Looking at the Field of Organizational Aesthetics" in the *Journal of Management Studies* (September 2005) suggest "aesthetics is concerned with knowledge that is created from our sensory experience. It also includes how our thoughts and feelings and reasoning around them inform our cognition". If we look carefully at the distinction of aesthetic/sensory knowing versus intellectual/propositional knowing which has been a prime driver through the Industrial Age, we find a distinction that is not just about how we know things, but why we know them.



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Intellectual knowledge is driven by a desire for clarity, objective truth, and ultimately instrumental goals. On the other hand, aesthetic knowledge is driven by a desire for subjective, personal truth, typically for its own sake. May Katherine Bateson, former Professor, the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former Dean of Social Studies and Humanities at the University of Northern Iran, makes the comment that "The only thing I know is that when we are confronted by change in every day life, business or personal, we improvise...and in every civilization ancient or modern, creativity is what drives improvisation!"<sup>12</sup> Aesthetic knowing and practice is what drives that creativity, and it is through tapping into those rich personal narratives of aesthetic knowing that new popular languages, new perspectives and new understandings emerge.

We operate daily in a complex and chaotic ecology where our very survival and personal identity is tied up in improvising knowledgeable answers to problems using iterative processes we have adapted to intuitively over time. This is essentially the ecology of the artist. The artist must ask him or herself every day: "What is the problem to be solved? How can I solve this problem? " And they work at it until the immediate problem is defined and solved—and then reflect on the overall value and quality of work before proceeding to the next stage, and so on. It is an endlessly reflective process. In this way the artist's value is built on creative experience, the ability to be able to make sense of what is being produced through improvisation, iteration, implementation, dialogues, collaborations, reflections, and pattern-seeking whilst never having full control of the working output. And yet paradoxically, the artist invariably knows at what point the work is completed and how to speak about the value of the work and its meaning. On the other hand, problem solving in business is predominantly viewed from an analytical and rational perspective that has evolved from Industrial Age practice that proposes solutions can be controlled, measured and instrumental and the outcomes predicted.

This business orthodoxy is best summed up by Denning. He observed that the World Bank senior management approach was to have :

all graduates from the right business school ...take the standard management manual written in the rigid grip of theory (that) relies almost entirely on analytical thinking. Fix the systems. Re-engineer the processes. Streamline procedures. Bring to our difficulties a fix-it attitude, as though our past errors can be easily corrected with straightforward explanations. Reform and *flatten* the organizational structure <sup>13</sup>(my italics).

The difficulty for business and organizations is to comprehend the notion of subjectivity and its role in the process of creativity. The analytical thinking model doesn't work in this context. A journey that has as its theme subjectivity is a journey of a personal discovery and this works against the very notion of placing the organization at the centre of employee thinking on creative problem solving. There is reticence on management's part to embrace new thinking that requires vulnerability, compromise, critical and cultural analysis and often research taken from a holistic

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<sup>12</sup> Taking from a live recording I made on June 26, 2005 of a key note presentation by Mary Katherine Bateson at the Creative Problem Solving Institute Convention, 2005 held at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

<sup>13</sup> The Springboard by Stephen Denning Butterworth-Heinemann 2001 The Introduction under The Tolstoyan Approach Page xvi



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perspective and not directed at solving a particular problem. These are commodities not talked about as having value in the hectic world of business that seeks quick short term answers in a complex and unpredictable world.

Recently, articles appearing in the popular business press through magazines such *Wired* and *Fast Company* and the even more mainstream *BRW* and *Boss Magazine* in the *Australian Financial Review* model successful case studies and theories associated with creativity and innovation. A Google News Alert on the subject of Creativity and Innovation has over the last 12 months provided announcements on government Creativity and Innovation policies from countries within EU, North and South America, the Sub-Continent and Africa and China. New feeds from individual blogs providing tips, commentaries and critiques of creative skills and innovation processes and their applications in management and business in almost every industry sector appear daily. The 2006 IBM CEO Global Report "Expanding the Innovation Horizon", a summary of interviews with 765 CEO's worldwide concludes that CEOs see the primary issue going forward is the need to innovate business models and to do that they need to think broadly and act personally.

### **The Application**

Globally, educational institutions are starting to explore the emergence of this new type of business thinking in response to management's historical search for new agendas with their new assumptions. Harvard Business School will offer its first executive education programme in early 2007 on arts based processes in the business world. The theme and programme have yet to be decided.<sup>14</sup> MIT School of Management has well established executive education programmes presented through the Society For Organizational Learning founded by Peter Senge. The course philosophy is based on Senge's view that organizations are dynamic systems in a continuous state of adaptation and improvement. His approach is to explore these notions through facilitated dialogues.<sup>15</sup> Otto Scharmer, Associate Professor at MIT School of Management is completing a book entitled *The U-Theory*<sup>16</sup> that provides an intellectual framework for exploring how the individual works creatively and is exploring his theories with workshops around meditation and movement

The Centre for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, North Carolina is rated in the top 5 worldwide<sup>17</sup> in external executive education programmes designed by behaviouralists

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<sup>14</sup> Email circulated within AACORN Network 2005 from Dr Robert Austen, Associate Professor Harvard Business School seeking content and papers for input

<sup>15</sup> Peter Michael Senge was the Director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management, and is presently (2005) on the faculty at MIT. He is the founding chair of the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL). Senge emerged in the 1990s as a major figure in organizational development with his book *The Fifth Discipline* where he developed the notion of a learning organization. This views organizations as dynamical systems (as defined in Systemics) in a state of continuous adaptation and improvement .

An engineer by training, Peter was a mentee of Jay Wright Forrester and has followed closely the works of Chris Argyris and Robert Fritz and based his books on pioneering works with the five disciplines in Ford, Chrysler, Shell, AT&T, Hannover Insurance, Harley-Davidson since the 70s and 80s through today.

Senge earned an S.M. from MIT in 1972. He also earned a Ph.D. from the MIT Sloan School of Management in 1978. [1]

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ottoscharmer.com/>

<sup>17</sup> The Financial Times Survey March 5 2006



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who design theoretical and cognitive frameworks in which delegates are taught to recognize and modify their creative behaviors. The Creative Alliance, the Learning Lab, Copenhagen, Denmark uses traditional academic research programme methodologies built around arts based processes. The Lab emphasizes collaboration with representatives from the business sector to develop tools that facilitate organisational and individual learning processes as opposed to the individual action learning process favoured by the Banff Centre.

The Copenhagen Business School currently has an Artistic Director and in association with the Learning Lab introduced in 2005 a two year full time International Masters in Leadership and Innovation in Complex Systems<sup>18</sup> based on six principles - lead, innovate, communicate, network, design and produce. The main thrust of instruction is in action learning and the course has a component of creative skills development. Research in Australia has failed to locate any similar local initiatives.

With a design emphasis on facilitating a new business language, the Leadership Development Programme at the Banff Centre, Banff, Canada offers useful insights. The uniqueness of the Banff Centre programme is that it is entirely based on arts based processes that provoke deep aesthetic discourses to produce immersive action learning. The Banff Centre programme design philosophy is framed around the idea that the world is a far more chaotic and complex world than the one experienced in the Industrial Age. In order to make sense of it, leaders need to be more "present" than ever. Leaders tend to see what they believe rather than believe what they see. Data that does not agree with the individual's mindset is usually distorted to fit it or rejected or denied as relevant. In a resounding echo of Industrial Age analytical and rational thinking, if the facts don't fit the frame, it's the facts that are rejected, not the frame.

If leaders can be taught to change their point of reference and framing they can develop the ability to connect authentically with the thoughts and feelings of others in order to motivate and inspire them toward desired outcomes. The Banff design philosophy has been strongly influenced by the Ariel Group, a New York based consultancy and training company. Founded in 1992. the principals of the company, Belle Halpern and Kathy Lubar, both with strong business and theatre performance backgrounds, realized the importance of presence as a leadership tool and the ability of theatre rehearsal processes to offer a practical means of demonstrating this concept to senior executives.

They developed the PRES Model of Leadership Presence<sup>19</sup> with four principles a leader needs to master to be able to operate effectively.

They 4 principles are

1. Being Present - Able to be completely in the moment and flexible enough to handle the unexpected.
2. Reaching Out - Able to build relationships with others through empathy, listening, and authentic connection.

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<http://www.ccl.org/leadership/news/2006/ft2006.aspx?pagelId=1641>

<sup>18</sup> [www.laics.net/](http://www.laics.net/)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.arielgroup.com/leadershippresence/>



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3. Expressive - Able to express feelings and emotions appropriately by using all means of expression—words, voice, body, face—to deliver one congruent message.
4. Self-Knowing - Able to accept themselves, to be authentic, and to reflect their values in their decisions and actions.

The Banff Centre turned to the work of David Magellan Horth<sup>20</sup> and Chuck Palus co-authors of *The Leaders Edge, Navigating Change in A Complex World* as a framework and methodology for developing the creative competencies in leaders as a means of enhancing “presence” and to navigate complex challenges. Horth and Palus argue that in order to develop truly creative leaders as opposed to effective traditional leaders, there are six key creative competencies:

1. Paying Attention – Using multiple modes of perception to understand a complex situation.
2. Personalizing – Tapping into your and others’ unique life experiences and passions to gain insight and create energy to tackle group challenges.
3. Imaging – Making sense of complex information, constructing ideas, and communicating effectively by using all kinds of images, such as pictures, stories, and metaphors.
4. Serious Play – Generating knowledge through free exploration, improvisation, experimentation, levity, and play.
5. Co-Inquiry – Dialoguing within and across community boundaries of language, culture, function, and professional discipline.
6. Crafting – Synthesizing issues, objects, events, and actions into integrated, meaningful wholes.

The content of the Leadership Programmes (of which there are 9) take these six key elements and mould them around 5 key organizing elements - Self, Team, Business Unit, Organization and Society. The 5 day “Leading Change through Innovation” Residential Programme for example is built on the philosophy that “all organizations need to be constantly searching for improvement and fresh opportunities and this requires creativity”. Without creativity there is no innovation and the course includes exploration of how “successful companies and societies have been able to channel ideas and solutions into workable outcomes that provide value”.<sup>21</sup>

The programme content is divided into daily themes that have a logical sequence in providing a theoretical explanation of how creativity and innovation work hand in hand. Day One is devoted to “Creating Restorative Space”- Uncluttering The Mind; Day Two – Invoking the Imagination; Day Three – Testing and Championing Ideas;

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<sup>20</sup> David Magellan Horth is currently Senior Artist in Training at the Center for Creative Leadership, Greenboro North Carolina and President of the US Creative Education Foundation

<sup>21</sup> Leadership Compass – Leadership Development Programm Brochure at the Banff Centre Summer/Autumn 2005



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Day Four – Bringing Ideas To Life; Evaluating and Implementing Ideas. Day Five provides a summary of the 4 Phases of Innovation and has the participants make presentations based on the real life work problems or opportunities they have been asked to bring to the programme for consideration using the arts based methodologies they have been exposed to.

The course has two leaders - a lead facilitator and an innovation coach. The lead facilitator is usually an experienced corporate psychologist who can provide the behavioral theory and supporting case studies in session. In the programme I participated in the lead facilitator was Dr. Bastiaan Heemsbergen, a South African born psychologist and author of *The Leader's Brain – New Insights for Developing Leaders using Artful Brain-Based Tools and Strategies*. I participated as Innovation Coach and my role was to mentor each participant as they gained insights or epiphanies during the week and to guide and reflect these epiphanies back into the participant's own lives or work place.

The Innovation Coach has to be familiar with arts based processes and creativity tools and has usually had some creative facilitation experience. Prerequisite reading for both the Innovation Coach and the participants was Michael Gelb's book *How To Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci*. From day one, our business and organizational delegates are immersed in an advanced arts experience that explores content, design and process in a profound and insightful manner. There is no room for the delegates to shirk any issue or confronting content. The value of both a psychologist and innovation coach is that they offer a safe and secure place for this exposing and unpredictable journey.

The week begins with an outdoor theatre experience – an adaptation of Gelb's book.

A narrator steps out of the audience welcoming party, asks us to come on a journey with him back into the Middle Ages to discover what the genius Leonardo Da Vinci, who was both scientist and artist, used as his guiding principles in developing his creative capacities.

Leonardo Da Vinci makes his entrance under a small beautifully made stone bridge that is the centre piece for the outdoor set and asks us to think about the imaginary cave he has just left as his metaphor for whole brain thinking.

He is accompanied by 7 actors who each take a character from the name of one of his guiding principles.

- *Curiosita* – an insatiably curious approach to life and an unrelenting quest for continuous learning;
- *Dimostrazione* – a commitment to test knowledge through experience; persistence and a willingness to learn;
- *Sensazione* – a continual refinement of the senses, especially sight, as the means to enliven experience;
- *Sfumato* – (literally “going up in smoke”) – a willingness to embrace ambiguity, paradox and uncertainty;



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- Arte/Scienza – the development of the balance between science and art, logic and imagination – whole brain thinking;
- Corporalita – the cultivation of grace, ambidexterity; fitness and poise
- Conessione – a recognition and appreciation for the interconnectedness of all things phenomena – systems thinking.

The direction of the performances in this play is not about actors giving virtuoso performances – although some do - but about the need to engage the audience in the text and its meaning. The intended effect is to provide the delegates using an arts based process with a direct link to the subject matter they will be exploring in the coming 5 days.

The facilitator completes the introductory event by inviting the delegates to choose one of the guiding principles that they have an interest in and to engage in a reflective dialogue with the actor that played that particular principle. The actor' dialogue around their personal experiences they had in researching of the principle they played. A series of animated conversations began that often last for 60 minutes.

Each days programme commences with Mind Gym, a playful workshop concept constructed around the theory that the brain is a muscle that requires regular daily exercise like any other muscle. The workshops are made up of a series of 30 minute exercises that use theatrical improvisational and simple creativity tools to explore mental energy and focus, imagination and thinking in the moment. Content for the remainder of the day is constructed around the concept of the whole brain thinking paradigm.

The morning content concentrates on the rational. Heemsbergen offers the behaviouralist's approach as he explores his 4 step phases of creativity theory through a series of traditional PowerPoint presentations, accompanied by video case studies of creativity in action in business. He uses various behavioral measuring instruments to assist delegates understand their behaviour in regard to creativity.

"It is not our eyes that see, but, rather our brains. Far from "seeing is believing" what we *believe* seriously affects what we see" is one of the powerful PowerPoint slides Bastiaan uses to introduce his theories.

He poses the hypothetical question "why art and leadership collaboration" and answers it simply by saying "artists can help us make sense out of the complex and chaotic." He suggests "the first job (of leadership) is not to make decisions but to make sense. We care most about how leaders perceive and make sense of situations in order to make decisions." At first glance, what appears to be classroom teaching is illusory. It quickly becomes apparent that it is not. What is becoming clear is that reflective dialogue is a vital part of this learning experience and a vital skill of the facilitator is to continually keep this reflective dialogue alive during the exploration of the content. What is being learnt or being experienced that is unfamiliar is the question that is being asked continually?

It is through this questioning in these sessions that a language emerges that is the delegates own voice rather than the voice of the corporation. This freeing voice



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paradoxically is often uncertain because of the unfamiliar territory and the barriers it breaks down. Delegates talk about personal experiences in an environment that encourages tacit sharing of knowledge without consequence. The afternoon content presented by creative facilitators drawn from arts disciplines such as ceramics, visual arts, music and theatre offers the non-analytical immersive arts process experience that provokes the aesthetic discourse. The fundamentals of the processes of the art forms are quickly explained to the delegates who through a series of very simple exercises are encouraged to work with them.

- Using ceramics, the process works the delegates through from playing with clay to shaping a problem they are experiencing within the workplace. Delegates now in teams comment on the impression the shape has on them and how it affects them. From this conversation, the original shapers are asked to articulate learnings that might help them overcome the work problem.
- A grand piano on the stage of 1000 seat theatre is the backdrop for a music exploration entitled "the eight keys of the artistry of leadership". The pianist plays three pieces that are his own compositions and asks delegates to share firstly the images they visualized, the emotions they felt and then the combination of the two. A facilitated conversation around emotions softly starts to unravel and the end of the session finishes with a gush of tears and smiles of shared moments and ephiphanies - a sign that the provocation aimed at releasing and opening participants up for a deep aesthetic experience is working..
- A creative writing component frees delegates from traditional report writing habits to surface ideas and insights through a series of three 10 minute writing rushes where the only rules are that there must be no punctuation or capitals used and your hand must not leave the paper.
- An ecologist takes the delegates on a three hour walk through the beautiful Lake Louise deep in the Jasper National Park narrating as the delegates walk the story of the complex systems of the ecology of nature and its direct correlation with that of the ecology of capital.
- I run a three hour theatrical improvisation workshop that explores the notion of status and how it can affect either positively or negatively any transaction in the work place. The participants first improvise around a four line script to "feel" status and then participate in role plays around real problems they are experiencing.
- The evening brings the right and left brain thinking together as delegates work in teams exploring a business challenge using both the theory and practice they have been exposed to in the previous sessions.

It was Dr. Maria Montessori, the Italian educationalist who recognized the importance of implicit learning when she developed a complete educational system and philosophy when she first formulated it around her work with 50 orphaned street boys on the outskirts of Rome in 1907. She wrote:



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Supposing I said there was a planet without schools or teachers, study was unknown, and yet the inhabitants - doing nothing but living and walking about - came to know all things, to carry in their minds the whole of learning: would you not think I was romancing? Well, just this, which seems so fanciful as to be nothing but the invention of a fertile imagination, is a reality. It is the child's way of learning. This is the path he follows. He learns everything without knowing he is learning it, and in doing so passes little from the unconscious to the conscious,<sup>22</sup>.....

### **Program Evaluation**

In a post programme evaluation, delegates spoke about the value of creativity on various levels. A senior telecommunications executive was able to draw an analogy between the execution of the tasks carried out by a theatrical stage manager managing a play to an on-line engineer launching and installing a new communications network in a new suburb or city. Both had a role to oversee and support live action and to be able to improvise quickly in the moment should anything untoward occur. The processes and tools used by a theatrical stage manager enabled the executive to rethink how the on-line engineer in his role acts generally.

A senior project manager in the electronics industry had been able use visualization techniques to show decreased times in delivery and installation of the end product to clients from 18 months to 9 months and a subsequent saving of around \$3million. He had recognized the value the method of visualization in surfacing and solving problems collectively with his team. He established a "visualization room" that he staffed with a cross disciplinary team who captured a problem as it occurred through a visualization drawn on a series of whiteboards attached to the walls of the room. As problems occurred the team visualized them on the spot, came to a conclusion as to how the problem might be solved and then applied the solution, rather than have them remain lost, unseen in a morass of anonymous emails in an in-box

The value of the cross disciplinary team and the visualization process moved the organization from a functional problem solving organization that existed in silos to an organization that now viewed a singular problem holistically, that moved all its expertise and resources together to design a solution that all components of the organization could support. Not unlike the way a theatrical set designer adapts his creative effort to support the entire theatrical production!!

A most interesting evaluation was a response from a senior engineering executive who had attended 5 courses over the last 5 years. When asked what he had learnt in this last course, his response was a firm "nothing." When asked to elaborate, he stated simply that he had now learnt to think like "us" – meaning like an artist and the reason why he came back was because he needed to keep training to ensure his skills were evolving.

The operation of industry in the contemporary world very much reflects the ecology of the artist, yet continues to use Industrial-Age notions and language to gauge results and a paradox lies in the gap between the disciplines.

The language of aesthetics seems currently to be confined in the corporate world to a discussion on the economic value of the art pieces on the wall, when it could be

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.montessori.edu/maria.html>



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employed to reveal the hidden value of what business describes as its greatest assets: its people and their ability to be thoughtful and creative in solving problems and offer exciting new knowledge. So there is more than a metaphorical paradox when the CEO addressing his shareholders at the Annual General Meeting refers to the balance sheet, observing that he has been extremely diligent in his handling of the corporate assets - he has depreciated them correctly in accordance with proper corporate governance. How should his greatest assets, his people, feel about this?



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