

## How Business Is Using the Arts

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What? You must be joking; business funds the Arts and uses the Arts for entertainment.

True, but now companies are using the Arts (visual, literature, performing) in a variety of business applications. The reason is not hard to grasp. Business leaders are facing a bewildering, complex, and, at times, chaotic environment. The tools that worked in a Newtonian, mechanistic business world are too rigid and less effective.

This new business environment demands a new set of worker skills. Top on the lists of many workforce skill need surveys are creativity, innovation and risk taking. You don't typically find courses on these subjects in business schools, but you do in Arts schools.

“Art-making has an alchemical effect on the imagination. It awakens the senses and sharpens insights, teaching us to think in symbols, metaphors, and to decode complexity, so we can perceive the world in new ways. Art provides an opportunity for kaleidoscopic thinking. Each time we shift the lens of our perceptions, we gain new perspectives — and new opportunities for innovation.”  
*Linda Naiman, CreativityAt Work*

This business-Arts collaboration is well “below the radar” but some blips are starting to show.

“Step into a business meeting today and you might see something surprising. World-class jazz ensembles, Poets. even improvisational actors from the comedy group, Second City. What's going on? Actually, it's all part of groundbreaking business learning. And almost every day a growing number of Fortune 500 companies and smaller firms across the country are using these Art forms -- and others -- to learn new ways of developing workplace skills that are imperative in our changing, global economy.” *Philadelphia Business Journal, Friday, June 1, 2007*

There have been a few articles in the Harvard Business Review, Businessweek, Newsweek, and a few others, but don't expect a rush of companies to start Arts-based programs. Nick Nissley, executive director of leadership development at the Banff Centre in Canada, states, “...despite the growing recognition of creativity as the engine of the twenty-first-century global economy, there exists an interesting paradox: organizations need innovation but usually resist it. ... Innovation aims to unsettle the established order of organizations. Innovation is controversial. It always involves competition with alternative courses of action. It poses a threat to vested interests.”

## How Business Uses The Arts

COMPANY	ARTS-BASED METHOD	BUSINESS OUTCOME
McGraw Hill Companies	Theater, Jazz	Leadership Development, Corporate Values
American Express	Music	New service ideas
Unilever UK	Visual Art, Music, Theatre	Corporate Culture
Halifax PLC	Theatre	Improve Communication Skills
Principal Financial Group	Visual Arts	Generate new ideas, new ways of solving work challenges
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Theatre	Leadership Development
Bristol-Myers Squibb	Storytelling	Knowledge Management
Barclays	Music	Team Building
Quest International (ICI).	Art (Paintings)	New Product Development
Jet Propulsion Labs	Storytelling	Capturing Tacit Knowledge

Business use of the Arts transcends the size of the company and application. The Arts can be used for applications as simple as building teamwork for a small group, to complex, corporate-wide culture change. In addition, it appears that every Art form can be applied to a business matter.

## Why The Arts Work In Business

When you look at the nature of Arts-based vs. traditional methods of learning and knowledge transfer, it becomes more apparent why the Arts work in business environments.

Let's look at traditional business learning methods compared to Arts-based methods:

TRADITIONAL	ARTS-BASED
Didactic "Sage on Stage" lectures	Experiential
Hard skills/Analytical	Soft skills/Emotional
Explicit knowledge focus	Tacit knowledge focus
Left-brain logic	Right-brain creative
Normally passive	Always Interactive, participatory
Mechanistic	Organic
Tell	Show

The Arts have demonstrated abilities to touch hearts in addition to minds. Therefore the person or group more easily grasps the essence of what the Arts-based program attempts to convey. As Harvard Professor John Kotter puts it, "...in the real world of business change is driven by the heart – not by numbers kicked out of a spreadsheet."

Lessons learned are more deeply remembered. The most powerful aspect of Arts-based methods is that because of their rich use of metaphors and analogies, there is a remarkable ability to transfer tacit knowledge. (Tacit knowledge is often known as "expert knowledge," which is often difficult to explain and intangible, compared to "explicit knowledge," which is tangible and can be codified in books, manuals and specifications.) Tacit knowledge is vital to the success of any organization.

### **Business Schools and the Arts**

Business schools are increasingly adding Arts-based courses and programs. In the US, business schools such as Darden, MIT, Tuck, Stern (NYU) and others have embraced the power of the Arts. In Canada's McGill University, Professor Nancy J. Adler teaches a MBA seminar, *The Art of Leadership*, drawing on a wide range of artistic traditions and processes (including the literary, visual, and performing Arts) to enhance participants' capacity for significant leadership.

Reasons for this B-school trend are that innovative schools are aware of business needs and the ability of the Arts to meet these needs. Other reasons include the barrage B-school criticisms of noted business thought leaders such as Warren Bennis, Henry Mintzberg, and others:

"I believe that business schools are in need of a new revolution. They need to bring in people from the Arts and the humanities to reconceptualize what business education and research are fundamentally about. Technical excellence is not sufficient. It never was." *Ian I. Mitroff The Harold Quinton Distinguished Professor of Business Policy The Marshall School of Business*

Another trend is that many employers are going to Arts schools, not business schools, to recruit graduates who have creative and innovative skills.

However, it appears that the US lags behind Europe. Perhaps a key factor is that Europe is more associated with cultural heritage, traditions and the Arts. In addition, the same reasons that Nick Nissley used to explain why companies resist creativity could be at work in US B-schools.

### **Final Thoughts**

What the Arts offer to business is compelling. Expect to see an increasing number of companies and B-schools embracing this creative venue. So go out there and “Break a leg.”