

Aesthetic Intelligence

What Business Can Learn From The Arts

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I am not a businessman. I am an artist.

Warren Buffett

Why Aesthetic Intelligence?

We are in global world that is ruled by technology, and with this progress, we have regressed. We have literally lost touch with each other. Our senses have dulled and our business results have suffered. It is time to reconceive our approach to work, to rethink and reframe ourselves and our organizations. It is time to reconceive the future and stop replicating the past.

We believe Aesthetic Intelligence (AI) is a powerful capacity with the potential to reignite your senses. When Aesthetic Intelligence is embedded into your organization's cultural DNA, it will be evident in people, products, and processes. 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 leadership.

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 of an organization. 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 ensure high performance, they do know the consequences of a low performing

organization. Creating a culture of high performance, effective leadership, and sustainable alignment, is not only important, it is critical. When this is 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;
- Envious 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 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 we 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 propose that to achieve and sustain success each must master the creative process of performance.

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 distinctly not rational and concrete, and therefore not useful. The Greek and European derivation of the term, *aesthetic*, suggests it refers to a *sense of perception*. 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, because these are the ways in which we experience and distinguish our experience and environment. Our article will also illuminate how these senses have atrophied in the world of business, compromising people and financial performance.

The world of the arts and the world of business is an emerging 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, spark 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 playing roles and characterizations to illuminate 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 been 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 braving the rapids together. As such, their value is poised for being reduced to a fad, trend, or flavor of the month. As isolated experiences, they fall short for internalizing cognitive and behavioral culture change.

Based on years 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 is 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 pace demands being able to absorb, assimilate, associate, and act appropriately - the capacity to be present, to be authentic, and to synthesize.

Organizations are charged with generating a compelling experience for their employees, stakeholders, and customers, an experience that grows and sustains market share. Creating this experience has become increasingly difficult as the marketplace has become both global and virtual. To accomplish this, organizations must employ and optimize their 'sensemaking' capacity, their Aesthetic Intelligence.

In this environment of escalating challenges on all fronts, creativity and innovation is an 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-today 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?"

[1]

Although the methods of the arts can 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 in organizational culture are required in this fast paced, innovative economy, and we believe that Aesthetic Intelligence is a prerequisite to creating a work environment where creativity, collaboration, engagement, trust, strong interdependent networks, and innovation flourish. And, this prerequisite begins with how we think and speak about what we think, do, and produce.

What if we considered what we think as what we are designing? What if we considered what we are doing as how we are performing? What if we considered the results we are producing through the impact they are having? The mere consideration of these questions begins to expand our consciousness and accesses our Aesthetic Intelligence.

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. At the end of this article, you will be ready to take the first steps to cultivate Aesthetic Intelligence.

Elements of AI: Presence, Authenticity, Synthesis

To be aesthetically intelligent is to bring an artist's sensibility to leading and running your business. Observing, envisioning, innovating through exploration, and reflecting are the qualities that are essential for an artist's mindset and access to demonstrating Aesthetic Intelligence. The fundamental elements of that mindset are Presence, Authenticity, and 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. This seems logical and essential, whether or not we are speaking about business or the arts.

So, what stops us from being present? We are trapped by categories, premature cognitions. We become victims of our own social constructs and language, which cause 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.

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 on 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 he goes again, that is just the way he is.” We assign stereotypes to strangers of color, religion, and ethnicity. We follow scripts, instead of having present-centered interactions. We stop thinking, feeling, and seeing.

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’, or gives us a ‘claustrophobic’ feeling upon entering an office, or heightens our ‘energy’ after an inspirational talk, becomes a source of knowledge and action for self and interaction with others.

Presence also demands attention to movement. Movement often determines status. Take a moment and reflect on the various meetings you attend (staff, workshop, senior staff, etc.); notice the room, and the participants. Notice where people position themselves and how they use their physical body to be close or distant, declaring confidence, tentativeness, avoidance. Each and every movement of the body affects the surrounding space, and the experience of everyone in that space, causing rippling effects in conversation and relationships.

To be present is to optimize all of our senses and our ability to distinguish. Being present allows us to choose. It is the ability to choose between acting with intention in context or responding reactively.

When does premature cognitions limit your view?

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

Do you notice what is being said, heard, thought and seen?

How do you notice what is said, heard, thought and seen?

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 this will bear upon their performance. They seek to get inside the character, as well as the meaning behind the script, score, or movement. They draw on their experiences. They guard against overstating, 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 in each role, the individual must bring himself *authentically* and deliver the performance *authentically* for the audience, using a 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 the integration of the clarity of intention, and drawing on oneself to deliver on that intention. It is the 'how' of the 'what' we do 'when.'

Think of the wide range of interactions and relationships you have each day as peer, manager, leader, team member. In these roles, you will be asked to facilitate, report, influence, and respond. Striving for authenticity forces you to reflect on how you need to

be experienced, heard, and seen; it paves the way for you to act with intention to deliver appropriately for each situation. To be authentic builds upon being present, identifying intentions, and becoming who you need to be in order to achieve the objective at stake at that time, at that place, with that audience. It is a moment of choice and design, and, you must be believable. Authenticity communicates “truth to the teller, audience, story, and mission.”[2] To be or not to be authentic is not the question; it is the answer.

One of the great prevailing myths in the workplace is that our day 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. We are improvising much more than most of us realize. Being present inside each of these moments offers us an ongoing process of continuous improvement, iterative observation and reflection, which strengthens our ability to be authentic in the midst of unpredictable events.

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 or too late. Conversely, business people focus on the ‘content’, the ‘analysis’ of what they are listening to.” [3]

The natural context within which the musician ‘listens’ is far more of a visceral experience, whereas for a typical businessperson, it is more part of a cognitive process of analysis. For the musician, listening is not the work of ‘one’ sense, but all the senses: sight, touch, taste, feel, hearing, and the indefinable sixth sense, intuition. It is a visceral experience, offering a potent combination of sensibilities - a synthesis. The performing artist and the high performance businessperson both are 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.

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 ideas in order to be creative and produce groundbreaking ideas, products, and processes. A synthesizer sees underlying patterns beneath the surface. Synthesis opens a doorway to being creative, which in turns paves the way towards innovation.

The notion of a *creative class* culture may be a novel concept for business, but has existed in the arts for centuries. [4] The Renaissance bore witness to theatrical cities, emerging theatre communities set apart and erected on the margins of major cities. This became known as a *spectacular society*. These peripheral cultures embodied the 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. [5] 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. The conclusion seems to be that 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. [6] Unfortunately, our natural bias for creativity is stifled and atrophies over time producing adults who are afraid to think, and are unimaginative, and often intimidated by the unknown or different. It takes a stubborn person to remain an artist in a society that values conformity. It will take the same courage and tenacity in

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.”[4] 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. 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 we 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?

Are you curious?

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) provides you an idea of how an organization informed by Aesthetic Intelligence unfolds through its design and performance to impact. What is required for embedding of Aesthetic Intelligence is the

integration of the innovative elements that we see in this graphic. This will lay the groundwork to create a culture that is Aesthetically Intelligent. The following section brings some of these graphic elements to life with discussion and examples.

Alignment

An ensemble is a dynamic integration of performers in a production, tapping the inherent energy and skills of members and demanding that 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 and conditions

Business organizations, like ensembles are creating an experience, striving for rave reviews, connecting design with performance, developing performance for impact. It is not possible to speak of an organizational system without first emphasizing that any proposed cultural changes dictate modification of people and parts to ensure organizational alignment. 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 output. Even with the best of intentions, alignment is frequently disrupted by lone rangers, silo mentality, competitiveness, narrow decision-making and unintended ignorance. As we offer

the following organizational possibilities, we encourage you keep in mind that alignment is 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. We contend that the culture of 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 is valued, and interdependency is constant.

Earlier we spoke of the critical role of creativity and innovation. 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. This is no easy feat.

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

Intuitively Gore knew “improvising ensembles are the purest form of group genius” and that “innovation is inefficient, not time bound.” [7] 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 and were discovered by accident when an employee was on holiday fishing.

Gore strove to heighten meaningfulness and diminish fear. 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 your credibility is 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, dramatically altering the typical corporate relationship between failure and risk by celebrating failure with champagne.

Gore knew that money was not a motivator but could easily become a distraction and discourage risk taking. 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, an equivalent of 15% of salary in form of stock.

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

Artful Conversation

Language is the conduit of our work. It is literally the words we use to say what we think. What we think stems from where we have been, what we have been taught, and what we know. Language can be used for communication or conversation. Communication shares information; conversation generates connection. Great performances require great connections.

Today more than ever, our ability to connect effectively is suffering under the convenience and immediacy of technology. We fool ourselves into thinking that communication is sufficient, and that its ease and frequency will suffice. In truth, communication has failed, damaging relationships, development, and performance. Aesthetic Intelligence demands a return to thoughtful, mindful, *artful* conversation. “It is time to decide on the kind of conversations we have. The way we talk...shapes the way we work.” [8]

Artful conversation takes time and effort. Time to listen. Time to hear. Time to explore. It takes 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). A mere 7% of messaging is communicated by our actual words. Clearly, electronic communication cannot suffice.

An organization informed by AI is characterized by an artistic mindset. When there exists an artistic mindset, there follows artful conversation, characterized by presence, authenticity, and synthesis. Artful conversation is emergent and begins with listening, deep listening. Instead of preparing our response, we are *present*, absorbing the complete landscape that includes self, others, movement, tone, surroundings. Probing decodes the true message, encouraging authentic, not automatic responses.

Artful Conversation can make the difference between whether our conversation creates camaraderie or conflict, progress or regression, connection or abandonment. We advocate 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 are the conversations you are having?*

Engagement

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

An estimated 11-14% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs.[9] These "employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company." [10] 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 costs the corporation.

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. It is the

largest privately held software company who reported twenty-eight straight years of revenue growth in 2004. 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 stop 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 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

Leaders direct organizations.

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." [11]

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 has to offer. They give actors space to explore and own their characters, balance their need for control with empowerment, and know when to get involved and when to stand back.

Directors create a positive work environment, where everyone gets to speak and everyone'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 fail. In contrast, even a mediocre play may come alive with the right cast. After casting, a director recognizes that different actors need different things from them, so he adopts his interactions and guidance accordingly.

A director is a synthesizer, a sense-maker, a sculptor, who sees emerging 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 his 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, serving as a source of insight and inspiration for great leadership in any venue.

Why Aesthetic Intelligence?

We contend that when we look at the ‘what, how, and why’ of what we do in business with Aesthetic Intelligence another opportunity is at our fingertips. It is an opportunity to move with intention and grow your business while connecting with organizational purpose, marketplace, and people.

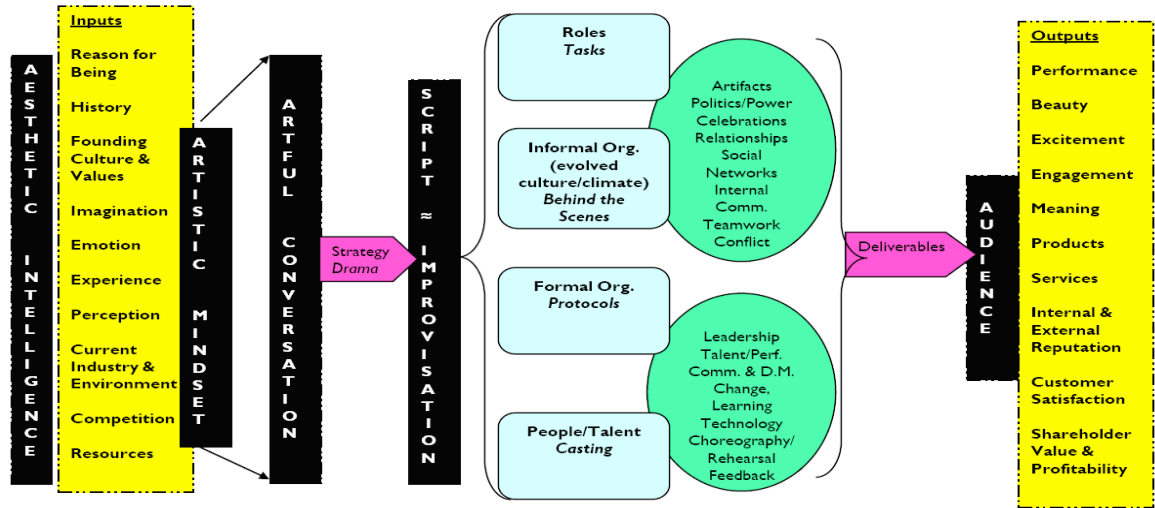
Embedding Aesthetic Intelligence means integrating a transformational capacity into the transactional. It takes reconceiving our approach to how we design our businesses and our leadership, synthesizing information from all sources, presently and authentically.

We can see how this operates throughout the culture of the performing arts. Artists are required to grant trust before it is earned, to be present and authentic in their roles in order to be believable. They are required to take in information through all of their senses in order to connect with their audiences. They morph into their characters rather than replicate their pre-existing ideas of them. The operative questions framing this experience are, “What does this character call me to be in this moment and scene?” or “How does the plot call my character to be?” In contrast, business players often come to meetings, interactions, and decision-making with a defined conclusion in mind. The operative statement framing this experience is, “What should be?”, and in this state, they easily become oblivious to the people and purpose of the meeting. This type of mindset, which is deeply rooted in most organizations, produces inconsistent and diminished outcomes and is disconnected from our fast paced, competitive environment where the game and the players are always changing.

To succeed we are being called to think, be, and produce in creative and sustainable ways. It is time to reclaim the full force of our senses and their potential. Becoming Aesthetically Intelligent could be the answer.

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

Aesthetic Organization



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Figure 1

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