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The Innovative Power of Art

Applications of Art and Aesthetics in Organizations

DEBRA ORR AND DON FETTE

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The Innovative Power of Art: Applications of Art and Aesthetics in Organizations

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Abstract: Developing innovative strategies is at the heart of the arts. Applying practices that include art-making and the aesthetic experience of artworks is a largely untapped resource in organizations that can be used for innovation, problem-solving, self- and other-awareness, cultural cohesion within the organization, and transformation. This essay offers an overview of ways in which the arts are currently being applied in organizations and a call to greater inclusion of arts and organizations in the future.

Keywords: Art, Aesthetics, Organization Development, Aesthetic Intervention, Creative Problem-solving

Introduction

Organizations confront a vexing mix of complex problems in their day-to-day operations. These problems—which are often intractable, paradoxical, and multifaceted—can require innovative solutions to mitigate. There are many traditional methods for tackling such problems—including root-cause analysis, data analytics, and definitional approaches—but, as contemporary problems grow increasingly complicated in step with the increasing complexity of our world, organizations must turn to more creative approaches to generating solutions. One bourgeoning approach that shows much promise is applying various forms of art and aesthetics to organizational needs. The application of art and aesthetics in organizations has demonstrated efficacy in terms of problem-solving, vision-building, communication, and self-reflection, among other areas. The ways that art and aesthetics can be used in organizations also varies such as having organization members engage artistic techniques; creating opportunities within the organization for artistic practice; participation in group art-projects; use of pictorial and musical interfaces; the creation of organizational art collections; and reflection on experiences as artist and audience are all examples of how art can be employed in organizations.

Organizations often identify themselves as "rational" logically constructed entities, and they typically use logical, methodical means for problem solving. The American Society for Quality, for example, puts forward the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle (Tague 2004, 390–92). Such methods, however, assume that the problems organizations face are somehow purely or discretely logical or rational. This assumption does not always correspond to the reality: one need only spend a day or two in an organization to realize that there are numerous paradoxical, irrational acts each day and that the traditional narrative for understanding organization is a myth. Additionally, organization members have an emotional connection to the organization, and even something as seemingly innocuous as a logo or the style of furniture in an office, an office location, or who sits where during a meeting can hold symbolic, metaphorical, or otherwise complicated meaning—meaning not restricted to the realm of numbers and pure reason. For example, one of the authors of this paper has been attempting to order business cards for the past three months. It has taken four people, and at least fifteen emails, to move this order forward. The cost is thirty-five dollars for the cards. The organization has easily expended several hundred dollars in staff time to ensure that she does not make a thirty-five-dollar purchase without authorization. This is clearly irrational. In order to resolve illogical and difficult issues in

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creative, significant ways, organizations must embrace a different perspective about their problems as well as use new methods to identify distinguishing features of successful solutions. This requires thinking about those same problems in new ways. Using artistic means is one way to drive creative resolution. Here we will outline some of those means and suggest an increase of their application in organizations for innovative, effective problem-solving.

Key Concepts and General Applications

The word "art" comes from the Latin ars and ancient Greek technê (from where we get the English word "technique"). The terms are often translated as "art," "technique," "craft(smanship)," or "skill." As Raleigh (1971) notes, art is the skill of transformation. For the Greeks and Romans as well as for us, art refers to the power to transform materials (e.g., the transformation of clay into a vase or of notes into music). In this paper, we take this notion a step further to include the transformative power of the experience of and the creation of a work of art by individuals within an organization to change an organization in significant ways. This use of art can foster the creation of a kind of knowledge inaccessible to a purely logical methodological approach. This power of art to create knowledge was expressed in an interview with sculptor Kathleen Farrell of Joliet, Illinois (Orr 2003, 131). She stated, "You know, you've never really pondered a toe until you've sculpted the toe or painted the toe. Then you really know that toe. Our knowledge is much deeper because of actually making the thing and going from abstract to concrete. It's something that makes something alive." Rooted in the power of transformation, art is a way to know something deeply and distinctly from definitional, abstract, or purely "rational" means.

The common definition of "aesthetics" is the study of the mental and emotional response to art and beauty. The word derives from the ancient Greek verb *aesthesthai*, which means "to feel, to perceive." It is important to note that while English has only two voices—active and passive—ancient Greek verbs can take on three voices: active, passive, and middle. The middle voice can be seen as a kind of mixture or middle ground between passive and active. Thinking about the verb *aesthesthai* in terms of the middle voice, we contend, can be a helpful way of thinking about the power of aesthetics in organizational innovation and problem-solving. It is a mode of knowing and thinking that can allow for the active nature typically ascribed to logical thinking as well as for the passive aspects typically associated with the emotions and passions. For example, the word "passion" sharing the same root as "passive"—while being neither a fully logical mode of thought or an emotional mode of thought. Aesthetics, then, can allow for "out of the box" thinking in a unique way that is not constrained by the traditional reason/emotion binary.

As noted above, art/aesthetics is a mode of knowing—a way of thinking—that lies beyond the traditional paradigms of the purely logical and the purely emotional. Beyond the ancient Greek and Roman perspectives, the modern foundational definitions of art and aesthetics are found in Vico (1725) and Baumgarten (1735) (quoted in Strati 2000, 14). They considered aesthetics to be a specific mode of knowing, separate from intellectual and rational knowledge. Baumgarten defined aesthetics as "the science of perception in general." In Strati's words, aesthetics can be further defined as "knowing on the basis of sensuous perceptions" (2000, 18). As such, art and aesthetics can, according to Strati effectively function as an alternative to the dominant rational-logical paradigm of studying and knowing, particularly in organizations (2000). He makes this assertion for three reasons: an aesthetic approach focuses on tacit knowledge, therefore utilizing sensory and perceptive faculties to produce knowledge; the five senses, with their ability for aesthetic judgment, are taken into account; and aesthetic judgment is defined as the nature of our response to art or beauty. Additionally, an aesthetic approach highlights the heuristic shortcomings of theories that rely on causal explanation of organization phenomena and the myth of rationality of organizations. Strati discusses "the unreliability of intellectual and rational knowledge of organizations." The theoretical basis of an aesthetic approach to organizations lies in the "finiteness" of aesthetic understanding and in the recognition that ways of knowing are paradoxical and complex (Strati 2000).

Employing art and aesthetics in the mundane world of organizations may at first seem counterintuitive, since art can carry the connotation of being a rarified, exclusive arena; however, art and aesthetics are not exclusive categories that apply to gifted artists and the fine arts. According to Dewey (1934), the roots of aesthetic experience lie in commonplace experiences. Dewey believed that artistic work is not unique and rarified. Art is a process of informed use of materials and the imaginative development of possible solutions to problems during the reconstruction of experience in day to day life. The process found in the work of artists is also found in all intelligent human activity, especially the sciences. Every time a chef makes a well-chosen substitution in a recipe, for example, he or she is practicing an art. Every time a construction worker uses a material in a new way, he or she is practicing an art. The chef and the construction worker both realize the nature of the expression they are aiming for and creatively guide the process to manage that expression—it is art.

The unification of expression (including emotion) and rationality, as well as the refining of meaning and values, are what distinguishes artistic work from other types of work. Art concentrates, clarifies, and enlivens meaning within itself. The unifying theoretical streams in this process are reflection and emotion. An example of the everyday work of art is found in "homers." Homers are created when factory workers take scraps and by-products from the manufacturing process home to create objects of personal meaning, often jewelry or sculpture (Dewhurst 1984; Lockwood 1984). In *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1934) contends that art is a product of culture, and it is through art that the people express the significance of their lives as well as their hopes and beliefs. Dewey's view of industrialization and bureaucratic organizations is that they create separation between the organization, the person, and what is truly important in the world. Art can help bridge this separation.

The artistic process is not only part of commonplace experience; all things are said to have an aesthetic quality to them (Dewey 1934). This includes art, theatre, architecture, poetry, or an event such as a rainstorm or graduation ceremony. According to Reimer, "The aesthetic is the domain of actual, existing, real objects and occurrences" (1972, 100). Therefore, aesthetics is not only the sometimes-rarified study of fine art; it also relates to the emotional and mental responses triggered by the aesthetic elements present in all things, including those things we interact with daily. Aesthetics is part of our everyday lives and, thus, part of organizations. If aesthetics is inherently present in the constitution of organizations (and they are not purely or merely "rational," as traditionally viewed), then turning to art and considering the aesthetic experience can be a valuable means of addressing organizational issues.

The topics addressed through art, in addition to permeating nearly all aspects of life from the rarefied to the mundane, often address deep, foundational issues of relationships concerned with a better future. "Tillich (1957) in his treatment of ultimate concerns, claims that all products of human creativity, from works of music, literature and art, and architecture to patterns of social organizing can be seen as symbolic expressions of ultimate concern" (Ludema 2001, 454). In other words, art and aesthetics are not merely concerned with the here and now, but they may also carry a kind of hopeful or built-in, forward-looking bent that could be useful in making positive changes moving into the future. Cooperrider (2001) has written about the use of the power of positive imagery to move organizations to desired future states. As Strati asserts, "There is increased scientific awareness that inhabited spaces are not naked containers for organizational action" (1989, 218). He is referring to the increasing awareness of symbolism in organizations that "focus attention on the symbolic conditioning of the actor, and on the physical appearance of the organization as a symbol with a strategic purpose" (218).

Another concept that must be defined for this paper is "metaphor." There are many views among philosophers, linguists, and literary critics on what exactly constitutes a metaphor (Pondy 1983), but for our purposes we will define it simply as when one object or feeling is held to be another. In addition, there is an aspect of equating something old and familiar to something new and unfamiliar or complicated. Some examples would be "The moon is Swiss cheese," or "His love is a red, red rose." In organizational terms, a metaphor can be a more informal, personal, and unofficial understanding of a larger idea. There is often no explanation accompanying a

metaphor; its meaning is embedded in the personally discovered knowledge of those who participate in its reality. Metaphor can allow individuals to access or understand organizational structures in ways that pure logic or pure emotion cannot. "This floor is one huge beehive," for example, can provide a way of thinking about an institution's organizational structure in a way that combines the architectural layout; the functions of the workers; the place of the manager, president, or CEO; the level of efficiency throughout; the nature of the work being done; and the emotional aspects of working there. (For example, do the workers feel like drones?) It may turn out that that floor of the organization is not a beehive at all, but the use of this metaphor leads to the conclusion that it should be. It may be that thinking of it as a beehive provides a new mode of self-defining or self-evaluating that is just far enough outside of traditional approaches that effective and efficient innovations could be made. Indeed, as Weick notes, "People see more things than they can describe in words. A metaphor can often capture some of these distinctive, powerful, private realities that are tough to describe to someone else" (1979, 49).

As the metaphor example suggests, using art in organizations is not merely about the passive experience of art by individuals in those organizations as spectators or an audience. Each individual in the organization can also fruitfully participate as artists themselves, regardless of innate ability or prior training. In other words, while the aesthetic stimuli of art and beauty evokes subjective responses in audience members that may help resolve organizational issues, artworks should also be recognized as communications of the individual or individuals who created the works: the artist. According to Dewey, "Art is the most effective mode of communication that exists" (1934, 286). Through art, artists are able to communicate their more obscured, complicated thoughts about subject matters, even matters about which they may be unable to readily articulate their thoughts in rational terms or in perfectly parsed-out prose. These thoughts and values of the artist surface through his or her art: that which the artist holds as important often becomes evident through the creation of his or her work. Therefore, both the experience of art and its creation may offer new avenues of self-understanding and communication within organizations, along with the acceptance and inclusion of many ways of knowing.

As we have seen, there are many reasons to study the relevance and application of art in organizations. Chief among these reasons are potential innovation, growth, and change due to approaching problems and issues from the aesthetic mode of knowing afforded by art. Indeed, identification of new iterations of products or markets can result from an artistic redesigning of a product. Similarly, creating new organizational structures to support the core competencies of work can come from an analogical alignment, as well as the generative practices in artic creation can build team and group cohesion. We will explore more concrete examples of the specific applications of art- and aesthetics-based techniques and approaches for use in organizations in the following section.

Ways Art and Aesthetics Are Used in Organizations

Art and aesthetics can be employed to influence organizations in more subtle ways than a full-blown organizational development intervention. There are three main modes of employment: aesthetic interventions, leadership development, and in corporate collections (see Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 in the Appendix). Briefly, aesthetic interventions involve in-house as well as external consultants "intervening" to resolve organizational problems by using various forms of art. These interventions can take the form of having employees draw pictures, construct metaphors to understand complex problems from the unique vantage point and to co-create or come to a shared vision for the organizational image or vision. Leadership development can draw from art and aesthetics to help organizational leaders to better understand and to articulate to other organizational members the constituencies, demands, and impact of their leadership role(s). Finally, many organizations have collections of artwork, from corporate logos to wall-paintings to sculptures and even the music played in overhead speakers or a certain style of furniture. By understanding how these components work together to provide a symbolic meaning,

organizations can use these collections to articulate and reinforce their vision, values, and goals to employees, partners, and the public.

Aesthetic Interventions

Aesthetic interventions are group-based (as opposed to individual-centered) and can take on many forms in which organization members themselves or outside consultants can use art and aesthetics to resolve various problems, especially those that have an overall impact on the organization. In the following, we will give a brief overview of some of the prominent and successful interventions. (A summary of these is provided in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 in the Appendix.)

One technique of focusing and stimulating intra-organizational dialogue and developing the participants' aesthetic knowledge was developed by Ohio-based consulting business Root Learning (2017). [THIS YEAR DOES NOT MATCH THE CITATION IN THE REFERENCE LIST.] Root Learning's technique uses "learning maps," which are pictorial representations of organizational life and issues. The learning maps are created jointly by Root Learning artists as well as the contracting organization. By representing in pictorial form features of organizational life and various activities and issues faced by individuals in the organization as well the organization as a whole, participants are able to make sense of processes that were too complicated to be clearly encapsulated in pure prose or even lists and bullet points. Root Learning describes learning maps thusly: "Strategic Learning Map® modules use icons, infographics, drawings, conceptual illustrations, and metaphors to tell your story in a visual way and facilitate conversations to create common understanding. Organizations whose people have experienced a Strategic Learning Map® module or a series of modules have seen a 65 percent increase in awareness and understanding of business and strategy issues" (Root, Inc. 2017). [THIS YEAR DOES NOT MATCH THE CITATION IN THE REFERENCE LIST.]

Figure 1: An Example of the Disconnect between Workers' Experiences and Management Expectation
Source: Root, Inc. 2017

Another example of an intervention involving the use of metaphor is described by Morgan (1993) in *Imaginization: The Art of Creative Management*. In it, Morgan advocates the use of imagery and metaphor to help managers see the possibilities for change and to hear personal feedback from staff. The people within the organization communicated, in the form of pictures,

how they related their organization to specific pre-created metaphors. Morgan himself offers this example from his website *Imaginiz* in the following excerpt.

One image that can help create great leverage is the "deerhunting" metaphor…Deerhunters set out for the forest, shoot a deer, and carry it back home. Right? Well, not exactly. They carry the body back, but the essence of the living deer remains in the forest.

The same happens in a lot of organizational development projects. Managers go hunting for the right program or concept for changing their organization. But when applied "back home," day to day reality takes over, and results are often disappointing. The trophies are there, as certificates on the wall. But the essence of what the programs were trying to achieve is somehow lost.

Many organizations experience this phenomenon, with programs on "teamwork," "vision and values," "empowerment," "leadership," following each other in quick succession. Something is learned through each activity, and the organization is nudged in the right direction. But the results are often marginal, and employees often end up frustrated and cynical:

- "Here we go again."
- "The new flavor of the month!."
- "What will the focus be next year?"
- "We're engaging in change for the sake of change."

The programs eat up time, add pressure to already crowded schedules, and create a lot of disillusionment. They don't impact the organization effectively because they are introduced within the context of the old organization, the old culture and the old system of politics, without appropriate accommodations being made. As in the case of project teams…the changes tend to be superficial, and are recognized as such by those with operational responsibilities.

To take a simple example, consider what happens when an "empowerment program" is introduced…The limits of "empowerment" are usually quickly felt as people run into the constraints imposed by the existing hierarchy. They quickly feel that they are "empowered in a box," and cynicism and disillusionment soon set in…If they shifted attention and focused, for example, on creating initiatives in places where teamwork and empowerment was really needed, they would have much greater impact. The deer would truly come to life!

The power of the deerhunting metaphor is that it can help create awareness and dialogue around the dead or dying nature of so many organizational development programs. As a result, it can create new leverage on the basic problem: that despite massive expenditures, forces within the established organization typically work against the new initiatives, holding old styles in place.

This can begin to reframe an organization's whole approach to change. It can redirect energy and focus attention on developing the living essence of programs, so that they can be kept alive in practice, rather than just hang as trophies on the wall (Morgan 1993, 141–141).

Figure 2: Deerhunting
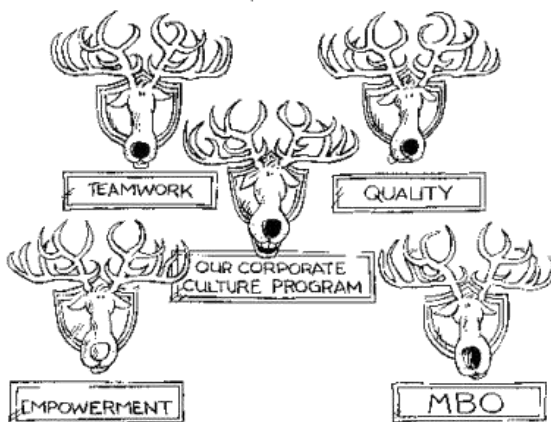*Source: Morgan 1993*

Similarly, organization development consulting organizations are beginning to integrate aesthetic ways of knowing into their interventions. For example, The Grove Consultants International (2017) uses a variety of aesthetic techniques to address multiple organizational challenges, including graphic facilitation, media design, and leadership development exercises. Grove has

more than twenty templates to help organizations visually organize their thinking. As an example, Grove offers this visual template (called "Mandala Vision") to help organizations organize the tactics and strategies which they will employ to achieve a particular vision. Figure 4 is an example of the template in use.

Additionally, the advent of graphic facilitation and recording has brought aesthetics into many meeting rooms over the last ten years. Graphic facilitation is the real-time visual recording of ideas, decisions, strategies, responsibilities, and threats that might affect a particular issue in an organization. Figure 5 is an example of graphic facilitation from the organization San Francisco Sustainable Streets.
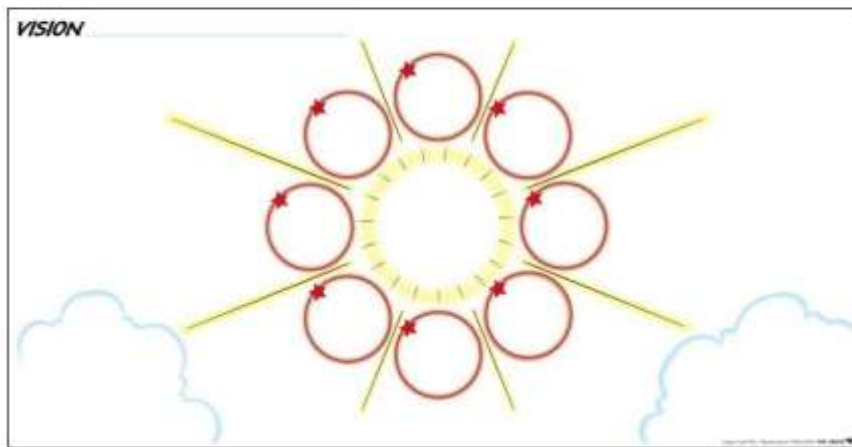

Figure 3: Grove Consultants "Mandala Vision" Template
Source: The Grove Consultants International 2016

Figure 4: Grove Consultants Mandala Template in Use
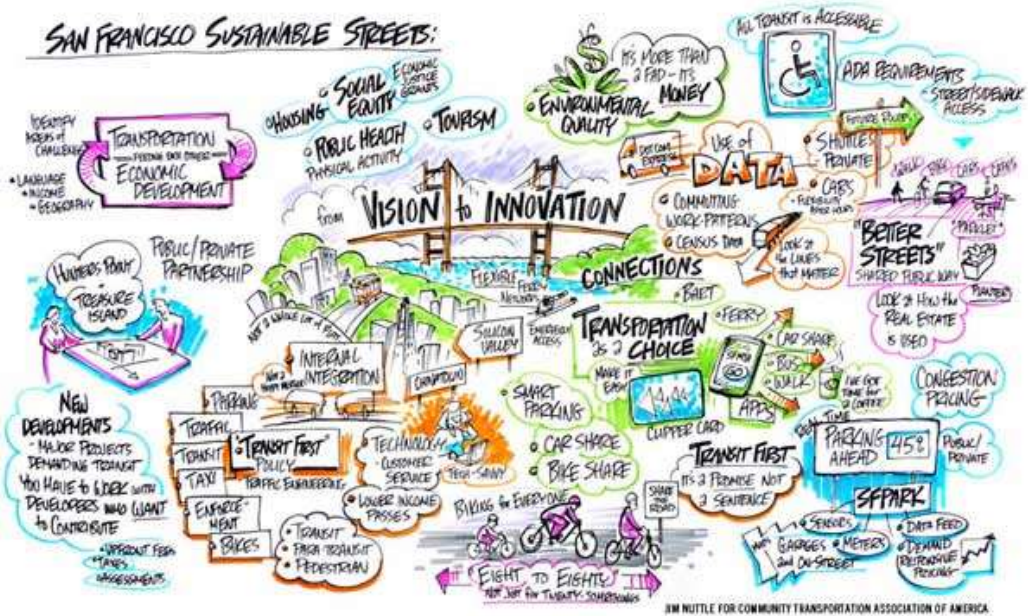*Source: The Grove Consultants International 2016*

Figure 5: Example of Graphic Facilitation from Sustainable Streets
Source: Sustainable Streets 2016

Similarly, Barry (1994) uses Analogous Mediating Inquiry (AMI) to engage the same notion of relating metaphorically, but he uses fine art, both visual and performance-based. The idea of AMI is to introduce an already-created work and to ask an individual how the work relates to their issue at hand. As an example, we will examine a work entitled *Lazarus* (see Figure 6).

This 1990 painting by Daniel Senise consists of a wishbone, like that found in a turkey at Thanksgiving. The bone is positioned half on the surface and half in the air as though rising, and a hand, attached to an unseen body, points to it. The title, *Lazarus*, is a reference to the biblical story of Jesus raising the dead. It is also indicative of the cultural notion of the wishbone, a way to bring about an impossible dream. Further, the painting references Michelangelo's painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, *The Creation of Adam*, by employing the use of the hand and the unseen body of God. *Lazarus* illustrates the cultural and storied influences of art via the biblical title of the piece, the magical powers of wishbones, and the hand of God. It also illustrates the profound personal loss and desires that had been experienced by the artist. It is social and personal at the same time. It is the personal experience of the artist during creation and the personal experience of the viewer in the gallery. It is also the common experiences of the culture that allow personal interpretation. From an AMI standpoint, the inquiry could center on resurrection, perhaps of a company, product, morale, or innovation. There could be themes of personal empowerment versus structural endorsement of direction or even that of life-giving and death of a project or idea.

Figure 6: Daniel Senise's *Lazarus* (1990)
Source: Artnet.com, 2016

Siler (1996) introduces the concept of "metaphorming" in *Think Like a Genius*. Metaphorming is a process that is described through the acronym CREATE (Connect, Relate, Explore, Analyze, Transform, Experience). Participants in a metaphorming intervention will draw a representation of an organizational problem using a metaphor, then they will expand on the metaphor to identify tangential feelings; impacts; inputs; and, eventually, solutions. Metaphorming uses our notion of schema, the expansive qualities of metaphor, and experiential learning to enhance creativity and problem-solving ability.

It should be noted that aesthetic interventions are not confined to visual art or metaphor— some encompass ideas such as music, dance, and theatre. Moore (2002) and Brearley (2002), for example, discuss organizational change in terms of musical metaphors and poetry. This paper, however, is limited to discussing visual art.

Simonson, Schmitt, and Marcus use the term "corporate aesthetics" "to refer to a company's visual…aesthetic image and identity" (1995, 60). A corporation's aesthetic is articulated through "package design, logos, business cards, company uniforms, buildings, advertisements, and other expressions and elements" (60). Further, Schmitt, Simonson, and Marcus (1995) devised the term Corporate Aesthetics Management (CAM) and additionally assert that corporate aesthetics can be managed to add value to the business. CAM refers to the idea that the entire visual representation of the organization, from the office layout to the furniture selection to the uniforms or lack thereof, will convey a message about the organization. (This concept meshes with the category "corporate collections," which is discussed below.)

In *Creating Shared Vision: The Story of a Pioneer Approach to Organizational Revitalization*, Parker (1990) provides an excellent example of an aesthetic intervention in the strategic visioning process at Norway's Hydro Aluminum Karmøy Fabrikker. Parker was the organizational consultant who helped the company create a shared vision, and in her book she describes why pictures really are worth a thousand words. The company's final vision statement, "The Metaphorical Garden," was co-created by nearly every employee over a two-year period. The creation of this vision allowed for iteration and refinement by organizational members and produced a piece that was immediately grasped by all members of the organization. They saw themselves and their work reflected in the metaphor (see Figure 8).

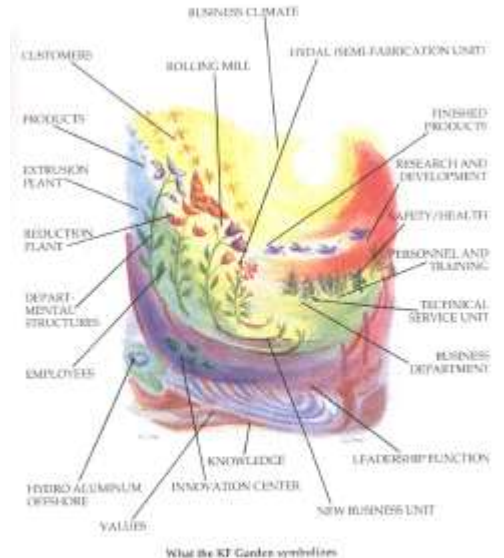Figure 7: The Metaphorical Garden of Karmøy Fabrikker
Source: Parker 1990

Figure 8: What the Karmøy Fabrikker Garden Symbolizes
Source: Parker 1990

Leadership Development

As opposed to aesthetic interventions, leadership development is centered more on the self or individual. It requires the individual not to look outward at the organization (as is the case in aesthetic interventions) but instead to look inward and address the question of what the individual must do to grow as a leader within the organization. As Bennis (1984) describes, a leader's ability to make his or her vision come alive for others in a vivid and real way is a key component of leadership. Leaders must be able to make intangible prospects tangible to others so that these ideas may be supported and implemented. This is a necessary function of leadership because the greatest ideas in the world cannot become real if others cannot participate and believe in them. Beyond the simple explanatory nature of imagery and metaphor, leadership has an obligation to "nourish the appreciative soil from which new and better guiding images grow on a collective and dynamic basis" (Cooperrider 2001, 33). The ability to engage in symbolic conversation in organizations is a necessary function of leadership and goal attainment. Weick adeptly explains: "People see more things than they can describe in words. A metaphor can often capture some of these distinctive, powerful, private realities that are tough to describe to someone else" (1979, 49). Although the focus is more self-centered, the use of art and aesthetics in this area has proven effective not only to help the individual leader in the organization understand their own roles more effectively, but also for them to communicate them to others. Below we will detail several prominent strategies and examples of how art is used for leadership development.

One technique developed at the Center for Creative Leadership, a well-known leadership development, research and publishing organization, is called, Visual Explorer (VE) was presented by Selvin et al. (2002) at the Art of Management and Organization Conference a session on Knowledge Art. VE is a tool for enhancing group communication, leadership, and sense-making. It consists of a large variety of pre-created images in a wide selection of content areas that are presented for their ability to facilitate metaphorical and emotional connections. Participants are asked to select a single image from the entire set that evokes for them some important aspect of the previously defined challenge (or issue, idea, etc.) of which the group tries to make sense. Dialogue proceeds in small groups, using the images as a kind of metaphorical scaffold, first to describe their challenge and then to invite the perceptions and impressions of

others. VE is based in research and practice showing that images are building blocks and carriers of ideas, emotions, intuitions, knowledge, and action patterns.

De Ciantis offers another example of how art can be used in organizations. She relates an example of how a temporary excursion away from words and into the visual arts can be useful in developing creative thinking: "My colleague, Chris Musselwhite, and I introduced a nonverbal process of drawing individual, then 'blended,' visions of the most important thing each participant wanted to see reflected in the organization five years ahead" (1995, xii). The process that Musselwhite and De Ciantis describe sounds similar to an individual visual appreciative inquiry. Zuboff (1988) had individuals draw (as opposed to write out in words) their impressions of technological changes at their workplace. She notes during her work with clerical workers undergoing information technology changes, "During my discussions with these office workers, I sometimes asked them to draw pictures that represented their 'felt sense' of their job experience before and after the conversion to the new computer system" (1988, 141). The drawings would allow employees to communicate their frustrations and joys in ways that they may not otherwise. De Ciantis (1995) also describes a technique employed at the Center for Creative Leadership that uses art to help people develop as leaders. It is designed based on an exploration of artistic modes of inquiry. De Ciantis describes it: "The touchstone exercise asks participants to think about their experiences in the program and, using a variety of materials, create an object that will remind them of what they most want to focus on in their workplaces. They then write about its meaning in a 'learning journal,' and if they wish, verbally share the story with the whole participant group" (1995, 1).

The program included an outcomes assessment, which indicated that the program had a positive influence and that the aesthetic-based epistemology contributes to that impact (Young and Dixon 1996). This learning exercise incorporates visual art—including sculpting—and drama performance. The Center for Creative Leadership's "Leading Creatively" program defines a set of "aesthetic competencies" for leadership. This echoes Bennis' assertion that leaders manage attention "through a compelling vision that brings others to a place they have not been before" (1984, 19). To make dreams apparent to others, and to align people with them, leaders must communicate their vision. Leaders make ideas tangible and real to others so they can support them. No matter how marvelous the vision, the effective leaders must use a metaphor, a word, or a model to make that vision clear to others, and the arts can provide the means to do so.

Palus and Horth (1998), the designers of the "Leading Creatively" program, note that their work at the Center for Creative Leadership has found two sets of competencies necessary to lead creatively: rational skills and the often-neglected aesthetic competencies. Leading creatively is essential to organizational sustainability. Identifying strategies that are not obvious to competitors has tremendous value in the marketplace, and making the vision of the future organizational state come alive and be vivid in the minds of staff is essential for change to occur.

Corporate Collections

The way an organization defines itself and its mission and how it communicates its identity to others can be communicated through the way that organization displays its art—i.e., via corporate collections. A corporate collection can be anything from the style of furniture (gray, industrial Steelcase desks versus cocobolo and leather, for example), to various sculptures or other art installations displayed, to the kinds of logos/trademark images, or even the music played (serious, calming, classical music versus contemporary pop, for example). The kinds of art (collections) displayed by an organization can not only help members of that organization understand their mission, how they define themselves, and their moods and emotions, but also that of clients or customers. Beyond this, an organization's corporate collection can help to reinforce and/or challenge the organizational culture itself. With an awareness of this power, an organization can consciously choose to reinforce or challenge the existing paradigm of who and what it currently is and how it understands itself. Below are some examples of how corporate collections can affect an organization.

Nissley (1999), in his study of the adaptation of banking systems to federal deregulation, explains that the CEO of First Bank Systems utilized avant-garde artworks to illustrate the drastic nature of the change the bank had to undergo. While First Bank certainly achieved its goal of creating dialogue, sufficient organizational development interventions were not in place to seriously guide the conversation and, ultimately, the collection was dismantled. Nissley's research expands the literature of organizational symbolism to include the specific artifact/symbol of corporate art. Nissley's work describes the use of avant-garde modern art as a metaphor for change at First Systems Bank. The artistic works presented were, at times, objectionable to employees. The unconventional nature of the work prompted employee discussion, which, ultimately, was what the administration intended to do.

Sharf (2012) extends this conversation when she wrote about the most influential art collections and the purposes behind their development. The art collections are curated toward organizational purposes beyond financial investment, and are often reflective of organizational values, the organization's mission or other meaningful theme within the organization. Bank of America uses their art collection as a mechanism to connect with the public. While Deutsche Bank and UBS used their collections to reflect the organization's identity.

In *Corporate Art*, Martorella analyzed 234 corporate art collections in "an attempt to analyze the styles and mediums collected, and how they relate to the structure of the organization" (1990, 4). This study attempts to align corporate collections with more qualitative elements of the organizations to which they belong; image building, employee engagement, and organizational flattening are among the outcomes. The follow-up to Martorella's work was Jacobson's 1993 book, *Art for Work: The New Renaissance in Corporate Collecting*. Jacobson, an art historian, explored the relationship between art and business by examining forty corporate art collections and found that corporations both use and enjoy art. On one hand, art is an investment and a managerial tool; on the other hand, it is an element of décor and the environment. This study led Jacobson to recognize corporate art as "a highly sophisticated management tool" used by organizations that are "experimenting with novel ways to educate…the workforce" (1993, back cover). Corporate collections are an image-building tool for organizations, an engaging force for employees, an element of prestige for the company, and a gentle intervention in organizational systems that invites change and inquiry.

Outcomes of the Application of Aesthetic Principles

Based on the findings from Parker's (1990) intervention and results of other research (Orr 2003; Nissley 1999), the three applications of art and aesthetics discussed above can be aligned toward at least six outcomes (see Table 2 in the Appendix). These six outcomes—sense-making, embracing complexity, expression of the emotional side of organizational life, articulation of values, breakthroughs in creative knowledge, and facilitating the creation of shared vision—will be discussed briefly below.

Embracing Complexity and Making Sense

In Henrí Atlan's (1979) *Entre le cristal et la fumée* (quoted in Ramírez 1996), Atlan explains that complex systems differ from complicated systems because complex systems are ones in which the dimensions of the variables, or even the variables themselves, are not known. These are to be distinguished from complicated systems, since in merely complicated systems the diversity of the systemic variables and their dimensions are known. Atlan (1979) writes, "Complexity is thus a measure of lack of information and thus renders it more difficult for us to form pertinent ideas of the organizational realities we enact and which can impinge upon us" (quoted in Ramírez 1996, 237). Art can be useful in complex situations because it can provide an effective way to uncover the hidden or unknown variables at work in a given organizational problem, whereas a purely logical approach may be ineffective because it has no means of discerning the missing variables. Take the use of metaphor, for example, as a means of discovering the connection of an

organization to its wider context by recognizing the patterns underlying its interplay with the environment—translating these patterns into metaphor can uncover relations and connections that operate on more than the logical level (Palus and Horth 1998). The metaphoric example used above of the office being a "beehive" is just one example of how employing metaphoric thinking to an organization can lead to better understandings of a highly complex set of organizational issues. Indeed, as Ramsey adeptly put it, "Aesthetic interventions…are best introduced with the intention of revealing…those opposing forces, visible and invisible, that co-exist to form the gestalt of a system" (1996, 44).

Creative Breakthroughs in Knowledge

The environmental, political, and medical future of human beings is dependent on our ability to innovate (Brown et al. 2000). Employing systems that allow us to be free of previous schema and more freely analogize our possessed knowledge with new areas of growth helps us to innovate. Further, when art is used as a collective activity, this analogizing is multiplied by the experiences and schema of all members of the group. This activity offers the benefits of both art practice and the aesthetic experience of art. Delaney (1978), for example, explains how human beings need a concrete experience (such as a drawing or other artistic experience) to be able to abstract their knowledge to a higher level and identify tangible and immaterial things. By making knowledge tangible in the form of artistic experience, organizations will be able to more accurately articulate and fully engage in the questions concerning their future.

Expression of Organizational Emotion

The expression of emotions may seem unrelated to the processes and efficiencies necessary for a business to be successful, but is, in fact, key to organizational priority setting. Nussbaum (2001), Pinker (1997), and Damasio (1999) all agree about the importance of emotions in creating priorities. This evolutionary understanding of the emotive nature of human beings is something that allows us to ultimately determine what is most important to us and how we should conduct our lives, including the organizational aspects of living. An example of the expression of organizational emotion can be seen through using a metaphor and then collectively engaging each member's creation for analysis. The previous beehive example or in a specific intervention that requires organizational members to paint a representation of how they feel on a daily basis are opportunities for emotional expression in the context of an organization.

Articulation of Values

Dewey (1934) specifically talks about how art is the best mode of communication that exists, and Adorno (1997) adds to the notion by explaining how truths are inherent in artistic creation. The notions of effective communication and elucidating deeper, guiding truths are key to the maintenance of trust and integrity of organizations. In a time when many formerly well-respected organizations are suffering a crisis of standards, the activity of identifying, articulating, and animating values is critical to developing and maintaining public trust and financial solvency. Using art in organizations allows organizations to animate their deeper-value sets and apply them to organizational issues. By utilizing art for self-representation and self-discovery, organizations can reveal their deepest guiding principles. This can be done through using what we've described as "corporate collections." The genres and styles of art that a given organization employs can communicate consciously and subconsciously that organization's values. Does the company play classical music in the background or through overhead speakers? Does it employ art deco and industrial motifs in the sculptures, fixtures, and furniture? Or does it use low lighting, warm colors, and adopt an elaborate Victorian architectural schema? Is it almost over-decorated with young and "hip" thrift-store paintings and mid-century kitsch? These choices allow the organization to communicate something about itself to the participant in their design.

Facilitating the Creation of Shared Vision

Yet another reason for the application of art and aesthetics in organizations is the development of systems that shape participants' perceptions of their organization. Such perceptions are key to organizational change efforts (Ramírez 1996). Aesthetic interventions are not related to how organizations are, but rather to how organizations are understood. Further, because people understand organizations, the way that we develop our understanding of organizations, perhaps aided by artistic impressions, is at the heart of how we create meaning in what we do, where we work and how we see the future unfolding. Defining ways to create positive influences in the way people understand their organizations is a key factor in many organizational issues, including change, strategy, problem-solving, leadership, and visioning. Aesthetic interventions offer several ways for organizations to begin to engage in this systematic development of insight into themselves. Parker's use of "The Metaphorical Garden" is an example of this outcome.

Employment of art and aesthetics can also help organizations shape their future. The power for organizations to take control of their destiny is advanced by the power of positive imagery. Human systems are heliotropic, "they tend to evolve in the direction of positive anticipatory images of the future" (Cooperrider 2001, 32). Therefore, the imagery that is accessible to organizations as they try to create shared vision is crucial to their positive future development.

Recommendations

Given the emphasis on "logical" and "rational" solutions to problems across many organizations, it can be difficult to convince individuals to adopt novel approaches to problem-solving that employ non-traditional approaches that rely on art and aesthetics. We hope that the above overview of the various methods and approaches has shown the value that art and aesthetics may bring to organizations. We recommend that when an organization faces a problem or problem that traditional modes of (re)solution cannot adequately address—when seemingly impassible problems arise—it should deviate from inveterate, traditional methods and turn to art and aesthetics as novel yet effective modes of thinking and addressing problems, which themselves can be anything but "logical" or "rational" ones. In addressing such problems, external professional facilitation (consultants) may be more effective than internal attempts not only because of the expertise of the consultants in this area but also because an external, third-party perspective can approach issues from a fresh, unbiased point of view.

Using art and aesthetic-based methods and techniques can both reinforce and confront organizational culture. It can produce results congruent with or opposed to an organization's vision, culture, and/or self-understanding and thus, respectively, reinforce or call for change in an organization's structure(s). We recommend turning to art/aesthetics in these cases because while the approach can be confrontational, it does not engender defensiveness because it doesn't call out particular persons. People have multiple learning styles—some are more visually inclined, while others are experiential leaners, and others may be more textually based learners. The work described above provides a more holistic approach, as it does not simply rely on one particular style but instead hits on all of them so that more individuals in an organization have the opportunity to connect with and learn from artistic/aesthetic approaches.

Finally, companies should expand their traditional conceptions of what problems, organizational vision, and roles are comprised of (not purely "logical" components, but also emotional and perceptual ones) and devote more time and money to addressing problems and issues in a diverse number of ways that incorporate art and aesthetic interventions and approaches.

Conclusion

There is a disconnect between our traditional ideas of what constitutes a flourishing organizational culture and the problems and issues in an organization and the actual constitution of a flourishing organization (and its problems and issues). Traditionally, organizational structure and cultural has been treated as almost purely logical, rational, quantitative. This focus has ignored the qualitative facts that go into the making of an organization. Bringing in art and aesthetics into focus can lead to a more holistic approach to understanding how organizations can best flourish and resolve issues. We agree with Dewey (1934), who contends in *Art as Experience* that art is a product of culture, and it is through art that the people express the significance of their lives, as well as their hopes and beliefs. And Dewey's specific comment upon industrialization and bureaucratic organizations is that they create a separation between the organization, the person, and what is truly important in the world. Strategically inserting art into that equation helps reconnect with purpose.

From the current research on art and aesthetics in organizations (detailed above), we learn that art can be found in many types of organizations in a variety of applications for a range of purposes. We find evidence that art and aesthetics aid in driving change, developing shared vision, setting priorities, creating influence, and finding a common ground with customers. Indeed, we see a connection to and achievement of organizational purpose. Going forward, organizations should recognize the value of art and aesthetics and implement them more widely to achieve this connection and other benefits more consistently.

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Appendix

Table 1: Categories of Art and Aesthetics Applications in Organizations

Aesthetic Interventions		Leadership Development		Corporate Collections	
Author	Synopsis	Author	Synopsis	Author	Synopsis
Root Learning 2017	Learning Maps focused and stimulated dialogue to develop the participant's aesthetic ways of knowing.	Selvin et al. 2002	Visual Explorer uses pre-selected images to help make sense of organizational issues.	Nissley 1999	First Bank Systems: Used a corporate art collection to bring about a culture shift.
Grove Consultancy 2002	Utilized a keyboard of image solutions to address a variety of organizational challenges.	Barry 1994	Uses fine art to create metaphors about organizational life.	Sharf 2012	UBS: Art is key to the organization's identity.
Morgan 1993	Advocated the use of imagery and metaphor to help managers see possibilities for change and hear personal feedback from staff.	De Ciantis, 1995	Offers individual then group/blended visual appreciative inquiry.	Sharf 2012	Bank of America: Uses art to connect with the public.
Morgan 1993	Offered specific pre-created metaphors for reaction conversation.	Zuboff 1988	Pictures used to represent "felt sense" of change.	Martorella 1990	Connects corporate collections to the structure of work.
Moore 2002	Discussed change in terms of musical metaphors.	De Ciantis 1995	Temporary excursions into the world of creative arts to spark innovation.	Sharf 2012	Progressive Insurance: Art work is a cultural investment, not a financial one.
Brearley 2002	Used poetry, song, and imagery to evoke emotion within the context of organizational change.				
Simonson, Schmitt, and Marcus 1995	Coined Corporate Aesthetics Management (CAM) to describe an organizations' attempt to create a visual identity and image articulated through packaging, business cards, logos, uniforms, and advertising.				
Parker 1990	Co-created shared vision with every employee in creation of garden-themed mural in which every plant and element embodied metaphorical meaning.				

Source: Data Adapted from Orr 2003

Table 2: Six Outcomes and Summary of Outcomes Using Parker's (1990) Study

Outcome	Outcome Summary
Sense-making	Participants were able to explain their view of their work roles quickly and with impact. In Parker's intervention, participants were able to get a sense of all the factors creating change in their organization and its new alignment.
Embracing Complexity	Participants were able to visualize the multi-faceted work in which they were engaged. In Parker's intervention, participants were able to see the entire organizational system and the many factors that impacted their business.
Expression of the Emotional Side of Organizational Life	Participants were able to express how their interpersonal relationships advanced their work, giving rise to the articulation of priorities. Further, participants expressed that the activity was enjoyable and fun; only minor negative symbolism was created. In Parker's intervention, participation in the employee suggestion program indicated the greater sense of ownership that participants had for their role in the organization.
Articulation of Values	Participants identified and labeled their values and created a vision statement to reflect them. In Parker's intervention, the leadership is pictured at the bottom of the garden, nurturing it with nutrients, alluding to the notion of servant leadership and the core value that is inherent in that viewpoint.
Breakthroughs in Creative Knowledge	Participants were able to acknowledge skill sets that they didn't realize they had, including adaptability and accuracy. In Parker's intervention, participants acknowledged the impact that the work they did had on the environment and moved to adjust their systems.
Facilitating the Creation of Shared Vision	Participants were able to create a blueprint to guide their organization's future. In Parker's intervention, the co-created vision guided the organization toward greater cooperative action.

Source: Data Adapted from Orr 2003

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