

Work-related learning and the arts

Review of Literature

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Today poets, performers, painters and creative artists of many genres can be found helping companies meet their organisational learning needs by sharing their skills and perspectives with executive, managers and employees.
(Bartelme, 2005, p.8)

Historically in the United Kingdom, North America and Australia the relationships between arts institutions and the business sector have been predominately based around philanthropy, sponsorship and social investment (Galligan, 2001; Arts & Business, 2004; Bartelme, 2005). However, recently new relationships have evolved where *people in the art world have begun to share their expertise in creativity and high performance with the leaders of business* (Bartelme, 2005, p.7-8). These new business and arts relationships are built on arts organisations and communities providing insights and techniques into the creative process to assist in developing innovative solutions to business challenges (Beckwith, A, 2003; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Arts & Business, 2004; Buswick, Creamer & Pinard, 2004; Hall, 2004; Sandle, 2004; Bartelme, 2005; McQueenie, 2005; Osburn & Stock, 2005).

Research in the United Kingdom and United State of America (Hadfield, 2000; Beckwith, A, 2003; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Arts & Business, 2004; Hall, 2004; Sandle, 2004; Bartelme, 2005; Osburn & Stock, 2005) outlined how the arts are now being incorporated into work-related learning. Recent research outlined information where a range of different of arts techniques have been incorporated into workplace training and development and presented findings related to specific arts disciplines such as performing arts, visual arts, music and creative writing. (Hadfield, 2000; Beckwith, 2003; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Bartelme, 2005; Hall, 2005)

The performing arts have provided companies with opportunities to develop communication, teamwork, leadership and organisational skills (Townsend, 2003; Gibb, 2004; Corsun, Young, McManus & Erdem; 2005; Osburn & Stock, 2005). Visual artists have inspired and offered organisations skill development in creative problem solving and interpersonal skill development (Cohen & Jurkovic, 1997; Fritz, 1999; Hadfield, 2000; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Bartelme, 2005; Hall, 2005). The

incorporation of music had been used in these new arts and business relationships to build teamwork, improvisation and creativity skills (Hadfield, 2000; Zander & Zander, 2000; Muqbil, 2002; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Walzer and Salcher 2003; Harley, 2004; Rostron, 2003). Improvement of writing skills and development of storytelling techniques involved arts learning with writers and poets (Thompson, 1998; Hadfield, 2000; Hall, 2005; Bartelme, 2005).

Performing arts

The findings related to what the performing arts offered work-related learning were similar to those outlined by investigations into children learning with the arts during school (Catterall, 2002; Deasy, 2002). Hadfield (2000) found that the performing arts offered skill development to all levels of an organisation including the individual, the team/department and the organisational management. The individual in a performing arts environment had the potential to develop skills such as self awareness; awareness of others and a stronger understanding on non-verbal communication; interview, presentation and coaching skills; managing stress and relaxation techniques (Hadfield, 2000). Performing arts learning could assist teams and departments through team building, effective communication, giving and receiving feedback and understanding and working with diversity (Hadfield, 2000; Bartelme, 2005). On an organisational and management level there were opportunities to develop leadership skills; finding and sharing company visions and assistance with cultural change (Hadfield, 2000; Bartelme, 2005). Following are specific examples, as well as limited research into the effectiveness, of this approach to work-related learning.

In recent years Shakespeare had provided valuable lessons for business management teams as performing arts organisations developed executive programs in the United Kingdom, United States of America and Australia that incorporated aspects of these traditional texts (Townsend, 2003). These performing arts courses are designed to strengthen both leadership and management skills through the use of a variety of plays by Shakespeare, *the telling of stories adds a human element and emotions to management and leadership theory* (Townsend, 2003, p.14).

Engineering organisations have incorporated elements of performing arts into customised training designed to build communication and social skills, of highly skilled employees with a more technical background, to strengthen their interpersonal

skills for both internal and external customer interactions (Osburn & Stock, 2005). Research into this arts and business learning relationship revealed that performers and technical staff had three common areas of understanding. Both groups *practiced collective problem-solving under pressure*; understood the *value of lifelong learning* and thirdly, acknowledged their similarities as well as their differences (Osburn & Stock, 2005, p.36). These understandings were a helpful foundation for partnerships during the learning challenges related to skill transfer between these two distinct disciplines (Osburn & Stock, 2005).

Management skill development that utilised the performing arts had involved the incorporation of improvisational theatre also known as forum theatre (Beckwith, 2003; Gibb, 2004; Corsun et al, 2005). Investigating the effectiveness of improvisational theatre Gibb (2004) first identified areas of change in management. Identifying more innovative ways of tackling organisational management training was outlined by explaining how management in the past was more structured and managers specified how tasks should be organised; established routines; assumed predictable environments; relied on knowledge that was explicit, structured and linear and provided a top down approach to learning (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Gibb, 2004). However, in recent years management has changed to become more flexible which involved an exploration of the different ways tasks can be achieved through: spontaneity; improvisation; responding to a changing environment; knowledge that is tacit and seen as web-like; the generation of bottom-up learning and responding to invention (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Gibb, 2004). The performing arts had provided skills and techniques that assisted with the adaptation of this significant change in managing a team, department or organisation (Gibb, 2004).

Improvisational theatre had been found to encourage managers to develop an understanding of how they personally perceive and react to events, *practice alternate behaviours, overcome biases and expand their repertoire of managerial skills* (Corsun et al., 2005, p.298). The use of improvisational theatre was also effective as a means of building other management skills as it assisted in the exploration of problems and developing solutions (Gibb, 2004). However while encouraging creative problem solving and providing a place where managers could think and feel differently to explore a range of solutions, there were challenges in this approach to learning not

entailing the more complex management issues in short one-off management courses (Gibb, 2004).

To ensure performing arts-based learning offers organisations a comprehensive approach to building work skills there needs to be an awareness of the limitations (Gibb, 2004; Osburn & Stock, 2005). Four suggestions for maximizing the impact of art-based learning were suggested as important and included that the learning firstly, *did not follow a script* and may need to be *customised moment to moment*; secondly, avoided being *touchy feely unless it connected the dots*; thirdly, did not *prescribe* but did *demonstrate* and lastly, needed to be *intensive and specific* and *not judgemental* (Osburn & Stock, 2005, p.37-38).

While the above examples illustrated potential benefits and challenges related to what the performing arts offered work-related learning there are also examples of the benefits offered by visual arts and music.

Visual Arts

Successful use of visual art masterpieces in their training design was undertaken in the late 1990s (Cohen & Jurkovic, 1997). While there was *no magic formula* they *found that certain principles and techniques from the arts can be used successfully to transform the experience and outcome of learning* (Cohen & Jurkovic, 1997, p.2).

The *ingredients of inspiration* they use to guide their design include surprise, fun and drama and they find that the arts, if used appropriately, assist them in developing powerful learning experiences for their clients (Cohen & Jurkovic, 1997, p.2).

Fritz (1999) outlined lessons from visual artists that assisted managers and these included: developing an understanding of structural tension through the visual arts; taking time to move away and reflect before proceeding with the next course of action; using corrective adjustments to learn and keeping the eye moving to ensure one sees the whole picture. While there have been several discussions about the similarities between the artist and the manager (Fritz, 1999; Hadfield, 2000; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Bartelme, 2005; Osburn & Stock, 2005) there had been less research into the effectiveness of utilising the visual arts in workplace settings.

In the early stages of art-based training Hadfield (2000, p.23) believed that the *visual arts had been neglected as an essential component of any educational and learning system*. In recent years while there had been acknowledgement that the visual arts could be a powerful tool for change (Hall, 2004; Bartelme, 2005) there were still only a few specific examples.

The literature available provided examples where companies did not just use their extensive art collections for decorative purposes but also incorporate the artworks, and where possible the artists, into arts-based training to nurture and support creativity and innovation (Hadfield, 2000; Bartelme, 2005). Business executives and managers have participated in short visual arts courses where they are exposed to drawing, painting, paper sculpture and collage to gain exposure to creative processes (Hadfield, 2000; Hall, 2004; Bartelme, 2005). Visual arts approaches were designed to provide *inspiring, uplifting, memorable and fun* opportunities to *explore creativity in a safe environment while building confidence* (Hall, 2004, p.2).

Assisting management in the creation of company focus and vision was identified as an area that could benefit from the support of both performing artists and visual artists (Hadfield 2000; Bartelme, 2005). Visual artists have worked *with senior corporate boards to create physical models that express vision and map out the future* (Bartelme, 2005, p.9). Picturing the future appeared to be common focus of visual arts learning and Hall (2004, p.2) explained how London Borough of Croydon *used in-house creativity development techniques* where managers *draw a picture of how they want the organisation to be* in the future and share it with their teams.

While there was limited information related to the incorporation of visual arts, using music for arts-based training in workplace settings was popular (Gibb, 2004).

Music

Music appeared to be provide different approaches for the development of leadership, communication, team building and improvisation skills (Hadfield, 2000; Zander & Zander, 2000; Muqbil, 2002; Beckwith, 2003; Rostron, 2003; VanGundy & Naiman, 2003; Walzer and Salcher, 2003; Hall, 2004; Harley, 2004; Bartelme, 2005).

Benjamin Zander, a celebrated American conductor, had spent the last few decades travelling the world sharing his leadership insights with senior management teams (Zander & Zander, 2000; Harley, 2004). Zander and Zander (2000, p.162) described how he had tried to change the metaphor related to business relationships through describing leadership as a *relationship* that brings *possibility to others and to the world*. By using music as a tool Zander (Harley, 2004, p.1) invited business leaders to view their role differently by moving away from a sports coach model where, to win more, one had to *bash the enemy* and *destroy the opposition*, to a model where an organisation was a symphony and leaders were encouraged to *hear all the voices and make sure they are all heard*, inspiring and motivating teams and employees through improved communication skills.

Walzer and Salcher (2003, p.67) described how management can also learn to solve business problems through music:

Classical music is a metaphor for classical management. Strict hierarchies, rules, limits. Jazz on the other hand with its elements of jamming, improvisation and changing leadership, with its need to understand and bring in cultural differences offers a wide range of possibilities to create innovation from limits.

Rostron (2003, p.1) stated that *music provides a highly effective multi-dimensional framework for teaching a number of business skills*. It can help develop listening skills, encourage attention to detail and assist in solving problems by offering different ways of looking at the structure and nature of a situation using music as a model (Rostron, 2003).

Team building was another skill where involving the musical arts can have a positive impact (Muqbil, 2002; Beckwith, 2003; Hall, 2004; Bartelme, 2005). For example, Human Rhythms, a drumming group based in Australia, have taken music from just being a source of entertainment to being a powerful tool that assists in motivating individuals to increase team interaction and communication skills in an attempt to improve productivity (Muqbil, 2002). Percussion and drumming appeared to be a common area where music was incorporated into arts-based training for team building and creativity (Muqbil, 2002; Beckwith, 2003; Hall, 2004; Bartelme, 2005). The orchestral environment, as well as building leadership and communication skills, had also been used for teambuilding as organisations have used the *orchestra's unique*

work process as a way of demonstrating *high performance teamwork* (Bartelme, 2005, p.10)

While the performing, visual and musical arts are the main areas identified as arts-based training there are also other areas of the arts that identify the variety available when investigating creative approaches to work-related learning.

Creative writing – storytelling and poetry

Improving writing skills was another area of arts-based training. Storytelling techniques provided frameworks for developing effective ways to communicate and inspiring presentations (Thompson, 1998). As Hadfield (2000, p.20) explained

The ancient art of storytelling and the power of mythology and fable have transcendental qualities that reach far beyond the cognitive, left brain logical approach.

Hall (2004) explained how writers and poets have trained staff how to use language economically and creatively to improve writing and critiquing capabilities. Arts and Business (2004) explained how poets join organisations not to teach workers to write poetry but to improve writing skills as poets are experts in distilling language and ensuring clarity. Poets have also been engaged to help *senior managers understand their corporate contexts and develop narratives that articulate a sense of mission and direction* (Bartelme, 2005, p.9).

Conclusion

As the world moves into the age of uncertainty, nations, communities and individuals need all the learning power they can get (Claxton, 1999, p.331). However the rhetoric about lifelong learning for all and workplaces embracing creativity and innovation to ensure ongoing business success does not always match what actually happens for everyone (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski & Flowers, 2005). There continually needs to be a broader understanding of learning (Claxton, 1999; Bentley, 2000; Billett, 2001; Brown, 2004; Senge et al, 2005). While some educational platforms still focus on *content over process, ability over engagement and teach over self-discovery* the future needs to offer learners more (Claxton, 1999, p.331).

Research and discussion in the last few decades has offered adult learners

a richer way of thinking about learning, one which includes feeling and imagination, intuition and experience, external tools and cultural milieu, as well as the effort to understand.
Claxton (1999, p.331)

Learning with the arts within community projects appeared to provide opportunities to develop interpersonal and communication skills; increase personal, social and political awareness and increased ability and confidence in ongoing skill attainment. Ongoing research into learning with the arts during formal education outlined skills such as creative thinking, ownership of learning, collaboration, leadership and initiative. The growing area of arts-based training in workplaces also listed building these social and problem solving skills as aspects of the learning they offered. This literature provided details on how this area of work-related learning was becoming more popular in the United Kingdom and North America. It outlined how the focus was moving away from a philanthropic or sponsorship approach and developing more structured ways of meeting the professional development needs of adult learners. Alongside the growing demand, assessing the effectiveness of work-related learning with the arts had begun to discover what this type of learning offered individuals and organisations.

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