

Art For Business 2008

Self-Leadership As An Art

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As Leonardo Previ has asked in the briefing for this session, I will take a subjective perspective. Therefore let me give you some information about my background. On the basis of studies in art history, literature, and philosophy – and experimental photography as well – my first business adventure was setting up a holographic laboratory (1985). We had lots of cooperations with artists (Dieter Jung, for example). All in all, it was an artistic success. But not a financial one.

Later I changed perspective and began to work as a self-employed consultant, focusing on corporate identity and change processes in for-profit and non-profit organizations. While I started my own business, I finished my dissertation about the French-American artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Nowadays I am first and foremost working as a consultant and executive coach in a network of specialists. As a kind of part-time job I am a lecturer, teaching at my local university. And I still work with photography. Looking back from now I could pretend that there is a clear line in my biography that took me here to Art For Business Forum 2008 – but maybe this is just a helpful construction, like “fake your own history.”

My point is: I like to supply the viewpoint of an external change agent, my work is to foster creativity and courage in personal and organizational change processes. In my eyes there can be a strong connection between art and business. First of all, artistic skills are, as far as I can judge it, a part of the “package” of skills and abilities for leaders of organizations in transition or change, e.g. in mergers. Especially the ability to take on different perspectives is crucial.

In my very first projects as a consultant in the late 1980s I realized that my background, based on the studies in art history, literature, and experimental photography, gave me a special and distinctive position: I could supply a different approach, different methods, and, most of all, a different

perspective. It is a crucial task to find ways to deal with complexity in change processes and my point is that the context of art may supply helpful ideas, methods, and instruments. So in my eyes my added value was – and, hopefully, still is – to take different positions with unusual viewpoints, ask supposedly strange questions, and, with this, foster change. I called this **shifting context** because of the different context I came from. Nowadays I just speak of **changing perspective**. For my personal development I continue to work in the field of experimental photography and conceptual artwork.

This was the first part of my ex-cathedra-speech: talking about using and honing my mind-sets, approaches, and methods, derived from the field of art history and art production.

The other part is concerning my interest in research. At the beginning of 2008, after more than twenty years of working as a consultant, my decision was to take some time off and focus on a special topic. I started my project on SELF-LEADERSHIP. Until this November, I met 57 leaders and entrepreneurs to talk about their ways of leading themselves. My travels took me across Germany and to England, Portugal, and Italy as well. You can find some information in my English BLOG (www.futurehub.com). There was this curiosity in me to find out what successful leaders actually do to not only organize their work but to find and carry out their vision or to focus on their personal mission.

What I realized and what can be of interest for this meeting (called “From metaphor to organization: art and managerial training”) is that lots of these people do use creative mind-sets, skills, and methods, which have close connections to those of artists. But what is equally important is the fact that a large part of the interviewees did not use these approaches. This leads me to the question: what would happen if they did? In my eyes they might be able to sustain and even multiply their success. So there is work to be done... Now, at the end of the interviews, I am in the phase to write down my conclusions in form of a book. Not surprisingly, it turns out that SELF-LEADERSHIP is a relevant topic for entrepreneurs and leaders.

Let me give you at least two examples to illustrate the connections I see between art and business in this case. The first might seem simple or even trivial: many successful people use the same instrument as lots of artists: a **sketchbook**. They jot down each and every idea, they write, draw, do whatever seems appropriate to collect, structure, refine, and finalize ideas or concepts – or just keep things not only in mind but on paper. So one of my key findings is: check your instruments and methods of self-organization, leaders!

The second example again focuses on methods of organizing your work. I met a couple of leaders who actually were **using space** to be creative. What do I mean with that? If you meet “normal” CEOs they quite often just work at their desk or at a meeting table. Some do it differently. One of the interviewees usually works with the whole floor of her office. She is creating large patterns of cardboard sheets in different colors filled with notes, playing with these, figuring out priorities and, finally, collecting the pieces in a certain order to write down an agenda, a speech, or something else. By the way, she is a vice-president of a university. And now, in contrast, imagine a “normal” manager trying to be creative with his (or her) BlackBerry...

As a result of this recent survey of mine, I like to call SELF-LEADERSHIP an Art (For Business) – in the BLOG you will even find a suggestion for a seven-field model of SELF-LEADERSHIP.

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The time is too short to go into detail but there is one more thought I would like to supply. As the briefing text for this meeting suggests, the use of art for human capital development is surely worth a closer look. We should spend time to study the life and oeuvre of artists to find out what this tells us about SELF-LEADERSHIP. In 1998 I was at the Art Institute Of Boston as a visiting professor. In one of the workshops we – a small group of students, faculty members, and one entrepreneur – examined Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968, as a reminder: “American, born in France,” as the Museum Of Modern Art, NY, claims). We especially focused on the different roles he took throughout his life (you can find my text as a download in the BLOG, check www.futurehub.com). Based on the analysis of Duchamp’s work and life, the participants of the workshop examined their own approaches, techniques,

and, especially, the roles they played to be successful. Please feel free to download my text, it is called *How To Survive As An Artist – Examples From The Life Of Marcel Duchamp* and gives you a deeper insight of ways to study an artists life and work to “borrow” concepts, mind-sets, and methods for your own world.

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Time is flying, so here is a short 3-step conclusion:

1. Change Agents (or “Agents Of Evolution”, Ken Wilber et al.) should learn, test, and use mind-sets, methods, and instruments from the world of art to shift context and perspective.
2. Lots of successful leaders in business already use skills, approaches, and mind-sets similar to those of artists. And SELF-LEADERSHIP is an art in itself.
3. To find out how we can “use art” in human capital development we should scrutinize, maybe test, the life and oeuvre of artists.

Thank you.

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