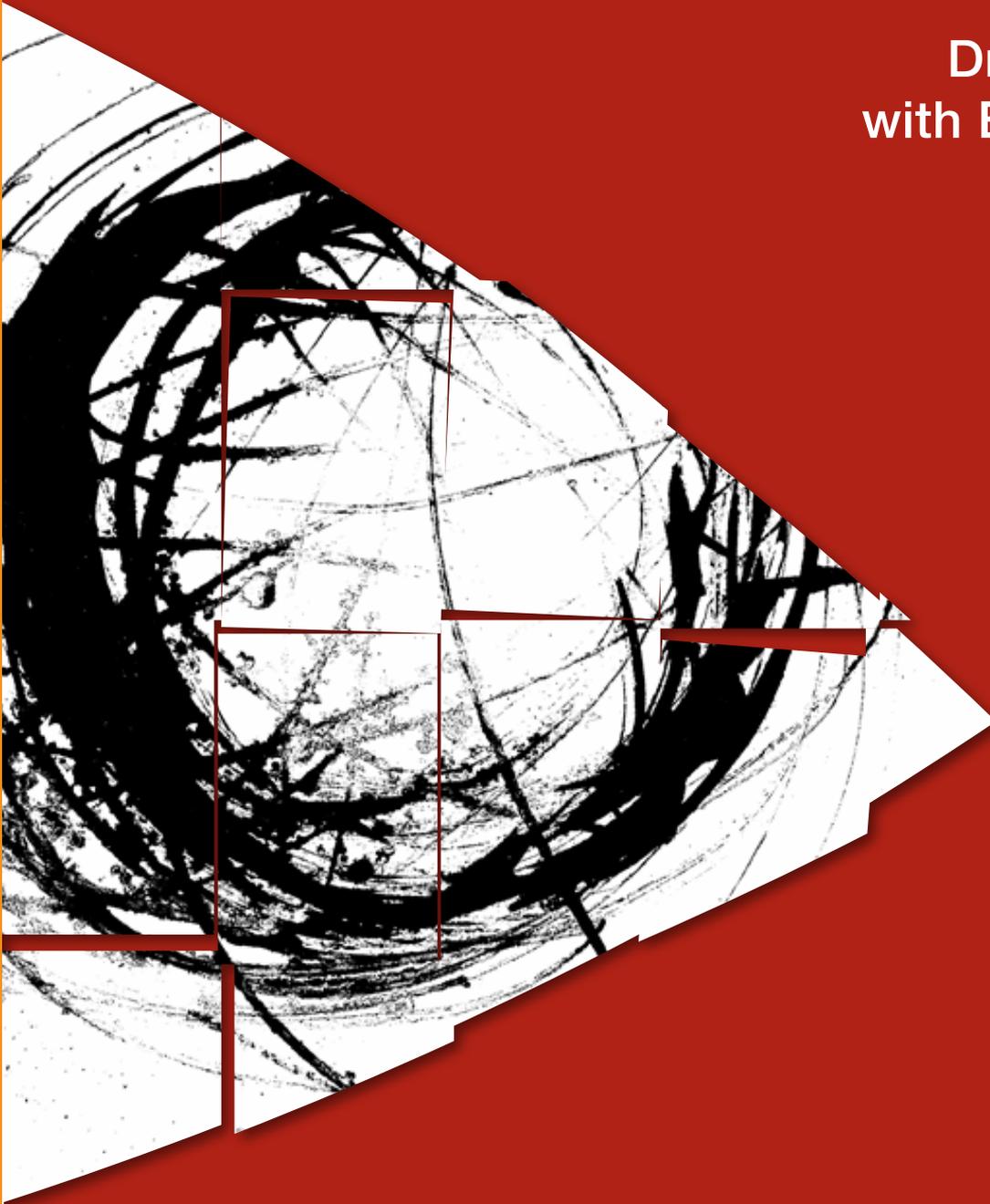


# ARTFUL ORGANISATION

Dr Chris Seeley  
with Ellen Thornhill

March 2014



**ASHRIDGE**  
business school

## Acknowledgments

I'd like to thank the artful people who have supported me in my work for years now – Barbara Blackett, Leigh Hyams, Doug Paxton, Chris Nichols, James Aldridge, Kathy Skerritt, Diana Arsenian, Bethany Koby and Ellen Thornhill.

Finally thank you too to Geoff Mead for being there all along.

*Chris Seeley*

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*For more information please contact [research@ashridge.org.uk](mailto:research@ashridge.org.uk)*

Ashridge Business School  
Berkhamsted  
Hertfordshire HP4 1NS, UK

[www.ashridge.org.uk](http://www.ashridge.org.uk)

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# INTRODUCING ARTFUL ORGANISATION

*"Me? I say make a sacrifice to the doodle; pick some flowers, speak a poem, feed the tiny muse. Draw, paint, sing or dance, and you'll bring the gods back into the board room; the laughing, smiling, weeping gods of the night-time and the wild."*

*William Ayot*

We designed this research to bring together what we saw as a great deal of disparate activity in our own work as practitioners, around Ashridge as a Business School and Consultancy and in organisations more generally. We believe that cultivating artful ways of knowing in the world – dance, film-making, improvisation, music, poetry, photography, sculpture, storytelling, visual arts, writing – is essential if we are to imagine futures where we organise and structure our activities sustainably. Abstracted rational thinking is also important, but we assert that on its own this is not enough to get us out of the dangerous global mess we have made for ourselves (and many speculate that it is the domination of these more linear ways of thinking that have led to such a precarious situation arising). Instead, we need to develop a healthier blend of ways of knowing, working and being that include:

- our embodied experience and sharp decisive minds;
- our abilities to pick apart the details and our glimpses of seeing whole systems;
- our sense of ourselves as being fully dependent on natural planetary ecosystems and our capacity to structure human organisations to meet our vital needs fairly, simply and well.

Our aim is to demonstrate the necessity of an artful approach for our shared futures and offer readers a structure and vocabulary for understanding and articulating this for themselves. We advocate for consciously bringing fuller, more-than-intellectual ways of knowing into the workplace and for using these to reshape the fundamental ways business is structured.

In this report we offer direct insights into the lived experience of world-class practitioners in the field. Drawing on selected theories and ideas, we challenge conventional ways of thinking in business and organisational life and seek to enable people to question the basic assumptions and frames underlying business activity. We advance our own theory of how Artful Organisation practice can work at best in response to the broad research question:

**How can organisations cultivate artful and creative ways to help reimagine their role, their relationships and themselves for a sustainable future?**

We offer some guidelines to those wishing to work with artful knowing and develop Artful Organisation and finally, we have created our "Manifesto for Artful Organisation".

**A bolder statement from Chris...**

Artful Knowing is concerned with how we come to know, how we cultivate our imaginative and perceptual capacities and what we allow to inform our decision-making in pursuit of creating more sustainable systems, structures and organisations.

I'm calling for this as a necessity if we are to realise the maintenance and restoration of ecosystems upon which we have no choice but to depend. My purpose is to stimulate thought and conversation about what might be possible and what is needed to question and break through the limitations of our current dominant paradigm. Artful Knowing is more about a way of being, a stance to take, rather than a solution or a method. There are no easy answers or quick fixes...

The issue we collectively face is one of imagination as much as one of ingenuity, and of living into radically different ways of organising ourselves as much as solving problems. How might our lives and organisations evolve in ways that are neither reduced to doom and gloom hair-shirt narratives of "less", nor reliant on the unrealistic mantra of business-as-usual-because-technology-will-save-us?

Our challenge is less about finding some kind of grey middle path between these two scenarios as daring to strike out in a bolder direction which demands the rigour and creativity of coming to sense, know and respond to our global life support systems in artful ways. This is not to reject our species' intellectual prowess and its importance as part of our attempt to meet our needs in sustainable, restorative and fulfilling ways, but it is to claim that the human intellect alone will not "save us from ourselves". Fuller ways of knowing are needed for us to recognise and respond to the living whole and offer us insight into how we are to be and act in the face of ecosystemic destruction.

**A bolder statement from Ellen...**

The limits of ecological systems are widely acknowledged, the limits of our economic system to deliver well-being are now hotly debated, but there seems to be a blind spot when it comes to the limits of our own cognitive capacities. This blind spot comes with the assumption that we can rationalise and invent our way around these other limitations. We need to become aware of the limits of our mental capabilities. Arts practice (as well as meditation, body work, time in nature) help us move beyond our cognitive restrictions and perhaps offer a sounder basis from which to tackle some of our pressing challenges – it is an escape route from our cognitive limitations and assumptions.

The once marginalised idea of ecological limits, finite resources, systems overshoot and the restricted carrying capacity of the planet is now becoming an accepted mainstream issue. There is an increasing realisation that our current Western lifestyles and heavily industrialised systems have inbuilt requirements that go well beyond these limitations. This new understanding has given rise to (often frenetic and earnest) activity around "sustainability" and "resilience" in many unlikely spheres of business and politics.

Likewise, the inherent shortcomings of our global financial markets are increasingly evident. The limits of our economic system to deliver their intended benefits of happiness and well-being are beginning to be acknowledged in academia, politics and society at large.

But what is given little attention is the limitation of our cognitive capacities in addressing these issues. There is an unchallenged assumption underlying much sustainability work that our very human capacities to think, reason and devise "solutions" will eventually yield the outcome we desire. A blind assumption that the very same consciousness that created these flawed systems, institutions and behaviours is indeed capable, through some miraculous sleight of hand, of delivering us from them. This may well be our final act of hubris.

The brutal reality is that for us to have a hope of addressing the pressing issues we face, we need to radically overhaul our capacities for generating knowledge and imagining new pathways. We cannot continue to create incremental innovations within the same paradigm, presuming it will be sufficient. We need nothing short of radical shift in how we “know” and interact with the world. We need a change in our consciousness. We need to loosen our grip on our dominant rational and analytical problem solving approaches and complement them with more intuitive, embodied sensing and knowing. I believe we need to let go of the game of “ego”, of extrinsic motivations, of achievements, solutions and fixing the world and arrive at something slower, quieter, more aware and more subtle.

These are not capacities that are new or foreign to our species, yet they have found little “use value” in the industrialised growth society, beyond being monetised, reified and celebrated by the few. Arts-based practices (amongst others) offer everyone a direct way of accessing different “mind” and hopefully entering into a whole new relationship with ourselves, each other and the world of which we are an integral part.



### Our working assumptions

In our initial discussions we (co-researchers Chris Seeley and Ellen Thornhill), drew out the assumptions we were bringing to this research related to setting the boundaries for what is and isn't included, for the ways we humans know anything, for the state of the world and for the future of business. In the next section, we introduce our ways of carrying out this research.

### Research assumptions

We carried out this research based on ten key assumptions:

1. The ways in which we understand the world have become increasingly fragmented and reduced to disembodied, abstracted knowledge (Bateson, 1973, Kegan, 2011), which excludes direct information from our senses (Springborg, 2010);
2. This separates us, our organisational structures and business practices from the realities and necessity of sustaining thriving human and other life and diverse, healthy ecosystems;
3. Business norms and organisational life will need to fundamentally restructure themselves in the light of these necessities;
4. Developing and valuing of many ways of knowing will better serve us and the rest of nature in imagining and creating such new structures than hyper-efficient, linear human thought and action alone;
5. Cultivating such artful knowing is more than just an optional nicety to portray, entertain or decorate (London, 2011); artful knowing (or, in Bateson's words “aesthetic engagement”) is needed for us and our organisational structures to reintegrate with the rest of life on the planet (Bateson, in Charlton, 2004).
6. Artful practice co-operates at many different depths in organisational life, ranging from entertainment and decoration, through to propping up business-as-usual, through to skills training, and through to fundamentally questioning organisational purpose, structure and form. The movement between these different states can be fluid and unpredictable, unthinking and accidental or deeply conscious and mindful.

7. Those involved in Artful Organisation – in whatever capacity – have a responsibility to cultivate their own active practice as a maker and not just passive recipient of others' artful work.
8. Although they are deeply embodied practices of great potential significance for imagining business and organisational development in the future, we chose to exclude the martial arts, meditation, art therapy, yoga, constellations work and sports activity (such as running) from this research.
9. Creative thinking (which is rooted in intellectual, theoretical brain-work) is not the same as artful knowing (which is rooted in visceral experience and the active embodied response of the "body intellectual").
10. Artful knowing encompasses receiving experience, ideas, data and responding in arts-enriched ways – it is not an analytical, rational thought process but an active doing process.

## WHAT'S IN THE REPORT?

We start with detailing our **Framework for Understanding** artful knowing in organisations. The model we propose is derived from our and many others' experience working inside and alongside organisation as well as our lived experience of our artful practice – on stage, at the drawing board, at the writer's desk, with musical instruments. Here, you will come to understand more of the nuances of artful knowing relative to branding work, entertainment, design thinking and skills building. We look at this work from a perspective of transacting within organisational life, of transforming it and of transgressing its norms and forms.

Second, we look at **Practising Artful Organisation** from the perspective of those professionally engaged in the field – both inside and outside organisations. In this section, you will see the concerns, possibilities and limitations of bringing this work to organisational life, including a section on respondents' recommendations for effective and meaningful artful practice in organisations.

Third, we bring the preceding sections together and draw a series of recommendations on **Becoming Artful** – for practitioners, commissioners of such work and to encourage people working inside organisations. We intend these recommendations to be useful common sense.

Next, we explain the key **Informing Theories** that have shaped this work: the extended epistemology, ideas of expressions of energy and Common Cause. This is followed by a section on **Taking an Action Research(-y) Approach**.

The report finishes with a **Coda**, revisiting why this work is important for our times and **A Manifesto for Artful Organisation**, designed to stimulate discussions more than to signal "Truth".

# PARADIGMS

## & WORLD VIEWS

ADOC3 Module 2 WS1

23 Sept. 2011



Tacit Assumptions



LOGICAL PARADOX

HELD OUTSIDE FRAMES

"A particular vision of reality"

~ CAPRI

Concepts  
Perceptions  
Values  
Practices

**POWER!**  
AUTHORITY

We can unlock the secrets of the universe

What goes for valid research?

Oral + Literal Cultures

What kind of real are you talking about?

Industrial Growth Society

Rational economic man

Post-modern  
Post-positivist

Let us assume that...

Who benefits from this and who doesn't?

PARTICIPATORY WORLD VIEW

MIND + MATTER

The world is not a given

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

PLAGUE

We can overcome!

- DESCARTES
- LOCKE
- HULME



Disenchantment of the world

WITCH BURNING!

What's there as it is  
Independence theory

ALCHEMY!  
SACREDLEDGE!  
Intellectual Wilderness  
RIDICULOUS!

MADNESS!



## FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING

There is a significant difference between using, or appropriating the arts in service of some predetermined organisational or economic goal (for example, branding campaigns) and cultivating artful approaches as a source of new knowledge, where the outcome is unpredictable because it is the product of improvised, embodied, more-than-intellectual interaction. From the responses of Artful Practitioners, we have seen that the planned, improvised, edgy nature of their work is of crucial importance to their sense of working well, and that the work may operate on many different levels, challenging, delighting and maybe even unsettling clients or questioning organisational norms.

This section of the report draws together a framework for understanding artful intervention at a meta-level – what might it be doing inside organisations? What is its potential to fulfill the kinds purposes the Artful Practitioners aspire to? When is it transactional, transformational and perhaps even transgressive in its effects?

If artful knowing is encouraged in organisations only to achieve “within frame” instrumental goals (like shareholder or personal gain), the organisation might benefit, but with little deeper societal evolution. If, on the other hand, a model of coming to know through interactive, improvised and reflective artful approaches were adopted, organisations might be deeply challenged because such a model would empower people to think and act differently. New voices and suppressed longings would be unearthed and heard, new perspectives would influence decisions and radically new ways of doing business might come into being.

Such activity may serve to reconnect us with the planetary systems upon which we depend and prime us to make decisions in the common interest, beyond the narrow confines of financial profit and business as usual. Indeed, participation in the arts *per se* may activate a broader common interest frame:

*“If aesthetic engagement offers us a remedy for our sealed-off, self-seeking purposiveness, it will do so by reconnecting, integrating, enabling wholeness and the recognition of oneness. Further, we must be involved in active process with the art and with the natural beauty... Engagement in aesthetic process, as creative artist or ‘appreciator’ of art (and ‘art’ means poetry, music, drama, dance and ‘natural history’ as well as painting and sculpture) enables us to recover our lost sense of unity with the living world, our integration with the rest of life on the planet.”*

*(Charlton, 2008: p141... Charlton, 2004).*

It is challenge enough to do and be this on an individual basis, but to do so collectively, organisationally, is a big leap. The following model expresses this framing as a way of understanding the interplay of practices, responsibilities, possibilities and motivations of artful organisation.

The horizontal axis of the framework looks at the continuum between generating new knowledge from artful activity that is directly sensed or experienced and creativity that is thought through. The vertical axis looks at the extent to which taken for granted norms and assumptions can be questioned and challenged in a given situation. In short, the framework looks like this:

	<b>Artful Activity that is Directly Sensed and Experienced</b>	<b>Creativity that is thought through</b>
<b>Questioning Taken-for-Granted Organisational Norms and Assumptions</b>	<b>Artful Knowing</b>	<b>Design Thinking</b>
<b>Within frame, does not question underlying assumptions and norms</b>	<b>Entertainment and Skill Building</b>	<b>Branding</b>

Next, we will look at each box in the table in more detail.

	Artful Activity that is Directly Sensed and Experienced	Creative that is thought through
<p><b>Questioning Taken-for-Granted Organisational Norms and Assumptions</b></p> <p><i>Enabling reframing in order to cultivate “bigger-than-self” responses to current organisational, social and ecological challenges in the common interest.</i></p> <p><i>Long term view.</i></p>	<p><b>Artful Knowing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transgressive/transformational</li> <li>• Learning by doing</li> <li>• Uncertain, ambiguous, personally risky</li> <li>• Embodied</li> <li>• Questions what is “normal”</li> <li>• Cultivates the body and senses as explicit seats of knowing</li> <li>• Is concerned with the evolution of society, ecosystems and consciousness</li> <li>• May start to reconfigure the organization itself</li> <li>• Expands capacity to come to know in many different ways – shifts the ground on which you are working</li> </ul> <p><i>Example: embodied, relational work such as <a href="http://www.interplay.org">www.interplay.org</a></i></p>	<p><b>Design Thinking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformational / transgressive</li> <li>• Learning through thinking</li> <li>• Organisationally risky</li> <li>• Intellectually processed with the physical body of designers excluded as an explicit seat of knowing</li> <li>• Overtly seeks to shape social space for a livable future</li> <li>• May develop novel structural models for the ways we organize ourselves (such as collaborative consumption and commons-based ownership)</li> <li>• Aims to meet human and natural needs in better ways</li> <li>• Positive, optimistic</li> </ul> <p><i>Example: innovation consultancies such as <a href="http://www.ideo.com">www.ideo.com</a></i></p>

	Artful Activity that is Directly Sensed and Experienced	Creative that is thought through
<p><b>Within frame, does not question underlying assumptions and norms</b></p> <p><i>Pursuing taken-for-granted outcomes for self-interested organisational gain and financial profit maximization.</i></p> <p><i>Short term view.</i></p>	<p><b>Entertainment and Skill Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transactional/</li> <li>• Transformational</li> <li>• May be soothing, inspiring and stress relieving</li> <li>• May seek to build specific skills and competencies</li> <li>• May filter out responses that question, undermine or critique its predetermined outcome</li> <li>• May have unintended transformational consequences in the long term</li> <li>• Expects to be of direct, causal relevance</li> <li>• Redresses the imbalance and dominance of intellectual knowing in organizations</li> </ul> <p><i>Example: inspirational speeches given by musicians</i></p>	<p><b>Branding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transactional</li> <li>• Art reified as something done by industry “Creatives”</li> <li>• Emphasises the aesthetic, the artifact, the image</li> <li>• Is self-referential</li> <li>• Covertly shapes society</li> <li>• Can be manipulative and exploitative</li> <li>• Creates demand and sales</li> <li>• Can reinforce destructive and addictive societal norms</li> <li>• Can inadvertently reinforce existing framings (for example, “green consumerism” still reinforces the underlying and unhelpful societal value of consumerism)</li> <li>• Seeks to condition people to respond in particular ways;</li> <li>• Does not necessarily meet vital human needs</li> </ul> <p><i>Example: much of the global advertising industry</i></p>

This framework is nothing more than a way of understanding the potential of artful knowing in organisations. It has been built from experience up, from years of playing, performing, drawing, photographing, storytelling, filming, improvising, visualising, designing, writing and moving inside organisational and business settings.

Like all models of this type, it simplifies fluid and contextually specific fields of activity with hard boundaries of separation. When we explored the model with the groups at Schumacher College, we noticed that these edges and divisions were places that attracted

workshop participants (we had mapped the model on the floor with masking tape so that participants could physically move around the conceptual space). Participants reported that these boundaries were places of potential – the potential to be more or less present and vital, more or less daring, more or less questioning and more or less radical.

We heard that participants yearned toward the full, embodied engagement of the “Artful Knowing” category, whilst recognising the other boxes as stepping stones which may lead to this deeper, riskier, potentially more

transgressive place. Maybe it was a spot only to be visited now and again and not inhabited as a full-time dwelling place... a state which is not available on-demand, but through dedicated, repeated, concerted practice. We used to think that this was all to do with being disciplined – and discipline does play a part – but moved on (when Ellen moved to India) to a sense of being devoted to artful practice.

Developing ways of changing what we think is good knowing or encountering the world through artful knowing is not just a matter of switching epistemological styles (Kegan, 1994: 201), nor of representing intellectual, abstracted knowing in “prettied-up” ways. Allowing the form and complexity of artful knowing to evolve is a matter of expanding epistemological capacity, of “a journey of increasing epistemological vision” (Kegan, 1994: 201). The above framework makes an explicit link between such a deeper vision and a sense of intention above and beyond the imperative to generate shareholder return. It expands the territory of organisational responsibility to include questioning, exploring and making transparent deeper issues of purpose.

We need to revise and expand our awareness and receive and respond to the world differently – in ways that aren’t necessarily reducible to intellectual knowing (remember the dancer Isadora Duncan’s quotation:

*“If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it”.*

Unknowns sometimes need to be left as unknowns, and to reveal themselves in their own time, through acquaintance rather than grabbing at an unearned familiarity (Kegan, 1994: 207). We don’t know all the answers and just thinking harder isn’t going to give them to us.

Down underneath our epistemological impoverishment, perhaps at the deepest level we know all this anyway. We know this in all the ways we have to know. Beneath the chatter and the noise, the statistics and the

facts, the messages and the tweets and the updates and the breaking news, we know in deeper, fuller ways. We know, deep down, that fundamentally something isn’t right about the ways we conventionally organise ourselves. Like creatures in a forest, sometimes this knowledge can only be glimpsed through the trees or with a sideways glance. Often it goes unacknowledged altogether. Our point of contact with this creaturely knowing comes through an invitation we must freely issue over and over again. Our responsibility is to make space for this embodied, vital conversation and gift it our attention in all the ways we can.

*“I know artists whose medium is life itself, and who express the inexpressible without brush, pencil, chisel or guitar. They neither paint nor dance. Their medium is Being. Whatever their hand touches has increased life. They SEE and don't have to draw. They are the artists of being alive.”*  
(Franck, 1973: 129)



# PRACTISING ARTFUL ORGANISATION

"It is difficult  
to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day  
for lack  
of what is found there."

*William Carlos Williams*

In this section, we present responses from experienced practitioners in Artful Organisation to the questions below. The participants in this part of the research are established in working with businesses and organisations, in bringing artful (and other) practices to this organisational consulting work and are active performers, artists and musicians in their own right. Several of them have written books about their practice. One describes himself as "pretty unemployable". Their comments and insights are presented anonymously under the Chatham House Rule.

Our aim here is to bring in other practitioner voices from as wide a range of artful practices and organisational settings as possible. This part of the research was carried out in late 2011 and during 2012, and the practitioners chosen are all well-established consultants and leaders in their fields, from the United Kingdom and the United States. This work is necessarily limited and it wouldn't make sense to present the findings as somehow generalisable to a larger population of practitioners in this field. Instead our project was to find the patterns, practices, compromises and possibilities of these ways of working in the world. The aim is to know more about expanding capacity for the ways

we come to know and work in organisations whilst reframing current organisational norms as rather narrow in their scope. The participants work with particular practices, along with deep experience in organisational development:

*Music*

*Narrative leadership and story*

*Poetry and freefall writing*

*Theatre, dance, movement and clowning*

*Visual imagery.*

Participants responded to the following questions which we devised following extensive discussions with artful practitioners – including each other:

1. Can you briefly describe your practice and (where appropriate) more specifically what you offer to organisations (and people in organisations)?
2. What do you think your work does for your clients (think both intended and unintended, short and long term effects)? What do they "get" from it (beyond the immediate experience – for example, if they are learning something about storytelling, writing or music... for what deeper learning or purpose?)

3. What is your purpose or personal objective(s) in doing this work? How explicit (or not) do you make that? And to whom? Commissioner – buyer – participants?
4. When the work that you do and the artful techniques that you employ get used in organisational and work contexts, how do you think it contributes toward a better, more sustainable future? This could be very clear or very subtle, short term or long term...
5. How do you keep your work edgy and alive?
6. What is your way in or entry point with new clients for the work?
7. How do you measure, assess or evaluate your work? This could be intuitively, qualitatively, quantitatively?
8. What are your recommendations for good practice in artful knowing (in organisational life)?

Taking each question in turn, this section adds substance, depth and richness to our overarching question:

### **How can organisations cultivate artful and creative ways to help reimagine their role, their relationships and themselves for a sustainable future?**

We also bring into the research responses to this core question and reflections on their experience from those who took part in the Artful Organisation workshop at Schumacher College in November 2011.

*“Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and inform our lives.”*

*Joseph Beuys*

### **1) Practices and offers to organisations and people in organisations**

*Can you briefly describe your practice and (where appropriate) more specifically what you offer to organisations (and people in organisations)?*

Participants in the research came from a variety of artful practice areas, encompassing movement, poetry, photography, improvisation, music, storytelling, visual arts and writing. They were consultants, facilitators, trainers, performers; and people with track records as senior public servants, business directors and managers. Most now chose to sit on the edges of organisational life: only one was working inside an organisation in a full-time leadership role.

Through their artful practice, they variously spoke of offering the following familiar organisational services: *achieving results, coaching, action learning, appreciative inquiry, leadership, stress management, communications, time management, team building, dealing with redundancies, leadership and board development.*

With the following, more or less conventional outcomes: *making interventions, exploring themes, enlightening, explaining, inspiring, teaching, illuminating, disrupting, embodiment, creating and sustaining change, becoming present, recreation, gaining insights, experimenting and fostering freedom.*

Straight away, it is possible to see that these practitioners are experienced, flexible, choiceful and resourceful people who, as well having

a degree of expertise in their artful practice, also have varying levels of experience and responsibility inside organisations. Many came to their artful practice in the second half of life and are what Buckminster Fuller called “comprehensivists”, transdisciplinary practitioners interested in and acting from the intersections between different practices.

*Our experience in this field, at workshops, with colleagues and with clients’ shows that it can take a long time for artful practitioners to declare themselves as such – such a public declaration can feel like a risk in a world where conventional rationality and abstraction are highly prized and rewarded.*

## 2) What the work does for clients

*What do you think your work does for your clients (think both intended and unintended, short and long term effects)? What do they “get” from it (beyond the immediate experience - for example, if they are learning something about storytelling, writing or music... for what deeper learning or purpose?)*

This artful work operates at multiple levels, ranging all the way from feel-good entertainment and simple enjoyment through to meeting conventional corporate objectives in better ways and further through to transgressing organisational norms and structures, thereby deeply reconfiguring lives, practices and values. Any of the practices might offer an “epiphanic moment” of deep insight, but from our own practice and experience, we would say that the work needs to be sustained and supported over time (a kind of discipline or “devotional practice”) in order to embed itself as a normal, everyday way of working.

The descriptions of what artful work does for clients slides between benefits to organisations (for example: “For my own organisation, the coupling of creative souls for 80 people has

*led to the award of a major contract of c. £5m”) and personal insights for individuals (for example: “My work opens clients to a broader, deeper sense of themselves... at best it can change lives, eradicate long-standing blocks and heal ‘wounds to the soul’”).*

At a first level, participants described the more **transactional** aspects of the activities they undertake, for example:

- the process begins with an organisation wanting a film;
- understanding more of how creativity and innovation operates at a group or organisational level;
- clients get to take a fascinating look at how jazz musicians work... and reflect on whether they could apply similar principles and techniques in the ways that they work;
- increasing creativity particularly with regard to problem solving;
- decreasing animosity between divided factions;
- transmitting critical company information in a creative way;
- complementing training programmes and conference settings... providing a decompression or ‘brain break’;
- entertaining;
- understanding the dynamics of how we interact;
- enhancing the group’s or individual’s memory of a given process;
- tackling difficult issues that are uncomfortable to work through in more conventional group workshops.

At a second level, participants said that their work serves in ways which may be seen as **transformational**: changing core behaviours, often in order to cope better with the stresses, pressure and rush associated with mature industrialised society. These effects may be unintended consequences of the work:

- gaining a more profound trust in the world itself;
- being more human at work;

- drawing deeper meaning from experience;
- understanding more of how creativity and innovation operates (or otherwise) at a group/organisational level and how such processes may be developed;
- learning to look back at what [people] do from a very different vantage point;
- recovering the original ideas that got [people] into leadership in the first place;
- my work opens clients to a broader, deeper sense of themselves as individuals and leaders – and so to the possibilities before them;
- an opportunity to revisit, re-imagine and re-cast their lives in both a work and personal context.

And at a third, more far reaching and potentially **transgressive** level, some participants in this research articulated the following in their work:

- Poetry and similar ‘soul work’ (this arts-based, emotionally intensive, yet natural approach) serves to bring right-brain and left-brain together in fruitful and rewarding ways. In the left-brain tyranny of organisations, metrics and faux-logic, this is doubly important for senior leaders if they are to avoid further failures of imagination such as happened at Enron, Lehmann Bros and Northern Rock. By structuring events that stimulate the senses and deepen people’s experience, one is able to address important human (and thus leadership) issues, including empathy, context, imagination and embodied responses.
- At its best I think [this work] helps to bridge the human concerns of the life-world with the organisational imperatives of the system-world so that people act at work in ways that are more congruent with our wider participation in the human and natural worlds.

This distinction, progression or deepening has informed our sense of potential for this work – even the simplest piece of “entertainment” might trigger a fuller sense of meaning and connection for some participants.

### 3) Purposes in doing the work

*What is your purpose or personal objective(s) in doing this work? How explicit (or not) do you make that? And to whom? Commissioner – buyer – participants?*

Participants reported both explicit and sometimes implicit purposes in the work they do – one said: “I rarely make explicit my personal objectives to anyone in this process”, whilst another said: “I make [my] inquiry-based approach entirely explicit to my clients”, and another: “Whereas participants are fully aware of [my] first objective, which I make explicit, [my second objective] is implicit”.

Personal and professional purposes might be utterly entwined (“I certainly no longer hide as I was originally advised to – both in style and approach”) or uncomfortably tangled (“As an organisation we have a clear set of values. I happily tell [people] about these... but... my personal way of working is regularly shackled by self-doubt and a lack of confidence”).

This may also be the case for commissioners for the work – where there is an explicit stated purpose for the intervention and, perhaps, an implicit, deeper, hidden purpose.

Purposes underpinning and guiding artful work ranged from the deeply aspirational (that towards which we might strive):

*Enabling people to become more whole (a process which psychologist Bill Plotkin calls “wholing”);*

*Helping people discover their own sense of purpose in life;*

*Contributing toward a better world through positive and sustainable choices;*

*Making a small contribution toward re-enchanting the world;*

*Changing our relationship with the world;*

*Humanising the workplace;*

*Widening leaders’ appreciation and awareness of both their roles and their environments.*

... to the more mundane (down to earth):

*Promoting creative learning;*

*Doing something from art and creativity through which I could make a living;*

*Widening appreciation of both roles and environments;*

*Earning an income.*

One respondent said that: *"at its very best [this work] actually answers the call of Bobby Kennedy 'to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world'".*

#### **4) Contribution to a better, more sustainable future**

*When the work that you do and the artful techniques that you employ get used in organisational and work contexts, how do you think it contributes toward a better, more sustainable future? This could be very clear or very subtle, short term or long term...*

For this section, comments are identified with the type of practice respondents' engage with. The question elicited some very direct responses. Emerging patterns show artful practitioners engaging with organisations explicitly working on sustainability issues as well as revealing an underlying working theory that working with an aesthetic sensibility leads to more sustainable choices than a purely materialistic sensibility.

##### **Improvisation**

- Improvisation is more than a metaphor – it is the actual practice... it helps organisation to better understand what they are doing... so they can go about it... in more sustainable ways.

##### **Music**

- [My] overriding message is that 'jazz thinking' is crucial if we are to move away from out-

dated modes of thinking to new ways of being and acting, which are responsive to the real needs of people, communities and ecosystems.

- [I like] seeing a near-concrete group of disparate individuals change from their stillness to an energetic sweating swarm... [but] it is the maintenance of this change which contributes to a re-occurrence of activity or a deeper learning. To sustain this experience into the future requires more cerebral processing and accounting.
- The most obvious [dimension of this work] is the sense of deepening the connections between people (even those who have worked together for many years) and engendering a heightened sense of how we are interdependent.
- Disembodiment and lack of care for self, planet and others go hand in hand. People naturally become more interested in these things when they begin to feel again.

##### **Photography and film**

- A sustainable future is, to a large extent, critically dependent on the foregrounding of both relational and aesthetic sensibilities – perspectives that are neglected by our current industrial consumerist paradigm.
- [I work in] collaborative social businesses and social enterprises that operate for the wider social good (rather than personal gain)... perhaps operating in this way is playing a part in this macro-change of business culture.

##### **Poetry and writing**

- Sadly, I've heard an inordinate load of crap talked about this. To be honest, I think we've reached a tipping point and the advent of 'new markets' and 'developing economies' is propelling us over some kind of cliff. It's now about how we manage ourselves – and lead in whatever comes next. In the long-term, it may well be about making a good end.
- [I work with] the fragility of the average leader's denial around what is happening to the planet on which we live.

- [I am] seeking to re-institute an I/Thou sacred relationship with the planet. This calls for a massive shift from ‘sky-god’, monotheistic and thus superior attitude towards the planet to a pagan, polytheistic stance and belief that places us as a part of creation rather than above it as the natural heirs to its creator.
- [The] experience of a more unified field, and the concomitant willingness to let go of individual defences, is perhaps the only experience that will contribute to a better, more sustainable future.
- [My work is about] letting some air into the traditional Western mindset.

### Story

- [I work with] our attempts to live into (new or old) different kinds of story. Story can help to activate the imagination and the heart so that new possibilities can emerge.
- Making decisions about the future based on the whole body, using intuition, inspiration and imagination leads to more considered and rounded steps being taken than if decisions are based solely on thinking.

### Visual practice and graphic facilitation

- I think my work helps people be more responsive through an artful experience, which helps them make more sustainable choices.
- I work with a lot of people in the sustainability and socially-oriented areas. By helping them move forward I believe my work contributes to a more sustainable future.

## 5) Keeping the work edgy and alive

### *How do you keep your work edgy and alive?*

In this section, responses are clustered around six themes: collaborating, improvising, listening, practitioners’ own development, presence and seeking novelty. From this, it is clear that Artful Practitioners are constantly evolving their practice – this is clearly not a “cookie

cutter” exercise, and there is a high degree of commitment to their practice as life practice, not just as a means to address organisational issues.

### Collaborating

- Collaboration... I work with the best people I can find.
- I love the opportunity to be with other artists, however they wish to define their art.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration.

### Improvising

- The very nature of improvisation means that no two sessions can be the same, and our own performance is continually adapting and changing as we explore our ideas of applying ‘jazz thinking’ to the challenges faced by the audience.
- I normally give [colleagues] a very limited brief so they don’t know what to expect or how it will unfold. We share this ‘uncertainty’ and ‘lack of knowing’ with the audience at the outset, as the musicians meet each other for the first time, live in front of the audience.
- I insist that the work not be pre-planned.

### Listening

- By always listening intently to the audience, and responding...
- I know the format, but not the response, so it keeps me alive and edgy, on my toes and excited.
- Staying curious.

### Practitioners’ own development

- I take courses myself to increase my own creative potential
- By walking in nature to reconnect with what is most important in life, by meditating, by travelling to other cultures to see how differently things can be successful, by following my intuition.
- Following my bliss and my heartbreak.
- I need to feel like I am nourishing my own creativity as well as other people’s; if the balance tips too far I can feel a bit empty.

- I listen to a Higher Source... I don't know who or what that is... Edgy stuff.
- It is important to me to continually explore new thinking about music itself and its place in different cultures... The role of cultural assumptions is significant in my work and by its very nature, it's important for me to be aware of my own assumptions and challenge them.
- I wander, go off track, following my muse and do odd things just because I want to.
- I need to make sure I get quiet space and time to do things like painting or making so I have creative energy to give to others. This is easier said than done sometimes.

#### Presence

- I turn up.
- I try to keep myself whole and healthy so that I am as alive as possible.
- Encountering suffering, death and conflict, and learning to "play" with these realities is an endless source of edginess.

#### Seeking Novelty

- I incorporate new instruments and new exercises.
- I use different jazz musicians at every event whenever I can, and I also put together new combinations of musicians.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration keeps my practice fresh.
- Constant change.
- I undertake speculative projects which deliberately stretch my sense of aesthetic and push into my sense of discomfort.

### 6) Entry points with new clients

#### *What is your way in or entry point with new clients for the work?*

Here, again, responses are clustered around themes dominated by the need for forming face-to-face relationship, recommendation and credentials both insider and outside of their artful practice. Only one of the respondents advertised their services.

#### Conventional means

- Website, social media, networks, conferences, presentations, direct marketing...
- I use social networking extensively and link this to a blog and website.
- This work is a hard thing to "sell".

#### Engaging with HR

- The normal entry point is engaging with people with responsibilities for human resources/staff development.

#### Recommendation

- Contacts I've met before or who have had a recommendation about my work from someone else.
- New clients have normally heard [the work] and have had a personal recommendation to take part in one of these sessions.
- People usually refer me on to others or I am invited to collaborate on a project by close associates.
- I would be in trouble without word of mouth recommendations and bookings from previous clients.
- Via a colleague who knows me and my work.
- I always look for an introduction. I rarely approach people cold.

#### Sample work

- I tell an appropriate story and that does all the door opening I need.
- Video can help to show what typically happens in a session.

#### Via more conventional work

- When I have worked with people in other contexts (e.g. Cabinet Office Top Management Programme) this sometimes crosses over from conventional leadership development into working more explicitly and creatively with story and narrative.
- I think it is helpful that my mainstream credentials are reasonably impressive (because this gives me more latitude to be unconventional and still be taken seriously).

## 7) Measuring, assessing and evaluating the work

*How do you measure, assess or evaluate your work? This could be intuitively, qualitatively and quantitatively?*

As one respondent noted:

*"The whole issue of evaluating the impact of artful practice (or any other organisational intervention for that matter) is quite tricky and subjective. Perhaps evaluating artful interventions needs aesthetic judgement rather than trying to measure cause and effect at an instrumental level".*

Unsurprisingly, practitioners were certainly engaged – deeply so – in rich evaluations of the work that they do, but in more disciplined intuitive and qualitative ways more than assigning numeric, quantitative judgements to the work.

### Intuitively

- I usually intuitively know whether I have made a meaningful contribution as I feel joyful when I have and tired when I haven't.
- Disciplined practice of critical reflection.
- I know when something has gone well and when it hasn't.
- If they are wide-eyed and their faces have changed, it's landed.
- Bodily, I can feel my relationship with colleagues become much more human and connected.
- The energy of the group.

### Quantitatively

- The main quantitative assessment is how long the relationship with the client lasts.
- Returning clients is a good barometer.

- Perhaps evaluating artful interventions needs aesthetic judgement rather than trying to measure cause and effect at an instrumental level. One could summarise the problem with the following question: "How many oranges is this giraffe?"
- I have often done my best work in groups who "score me badly" I could pull back and get "better scores" but that would make a pretence of the whole engagement.
- The number of [trained workshop] leaders [for the work I do].

### Qualitatively

- Qualitatively it would revolve around changes in behaviour.
- The value of this work is shown – in the moment – in the quality of depth and disclosure of the stories, in the shifting interpersonal relationships in the room, and sometimes in people's growing skill and confidence in using story and narrative.
- Occasionally I get some insight of longer-term impact (eg: shifts in self-perception, more effective teamwork, and changing attitudes).
- From verbal feedback immediately after sessions; from testimonials written by clients after events.
- I measure through testimonials and feedback.
- I occasionally get emails from people reporting their life-changes and progress.
- My poems appear on office walls and get ripped off by blogs and websites, or are turned into tapestries, or etched onto crystal retirement presents, is its own kind of assessment – of worth rather than value.
- Individual shifts and comparatively easily gauged as the action inquiry elements of the work enable the articulation of change and insight. The wider, organisational shifts are difficult to establish and validate above the turbulence and noise of organisational noise.
- The quality of the writing (for each person, from one day to the next).
- The quality of leaders (facilitating the work that I do).

## 8) Recommendations for good practice in artful knowing in organisations

*What are your recommendations for good practice in artful knowing (in organisational life)?*

- Having a clear sense of the particular contribution that the artful practice in question can bring. It is important to claim a space for artful knowing alongside more propositional / theoretical forms (ie: both-and, not either-or).
- Adroit and skilful application is required rather than strident advocacy.
- Abandon all masks, be willing to try new and sometimes precarious things yourself, laugh a lot with clients, don't take yourself too seriously, bring healthy energy into your work.
- Allow people to follow their personal creativity and encourage both personal and creative development as part of the organisational culture.
- Make trying new things the norm: don't make it difficult for people to try something that the organisation might not have tried before.
- Have people in the organisation who are interested in creative / artful knowing and make it part of their role to bring it into the culture through community building, suggesting new things and making artful connections.
- Know your theory and hold it lightly.
- Understand group process and be willing to explore or let go depending on the setting.
- Actively combat the reputation of flaky musicians, hippies and artists lacking punctuality and professionalism.
- Keep prices reasonable.
- Respect the expertise of the client.
- Believe in what you do.
- Provoke where possible.
- Be brave in the room – challenge left-brain prejudice.
- Having the courage to claim the space of being an artful practitioner.

- If you give up producing your own art, stop working in organisations.
- Share resources, ideas and knowledge.
- Establish artful knowing as an additional, rather than alternative way of knowing and do not disparage conventional knowing.

And, from a musician who has been exploring this specifically:

### Be like a jazz musician and ...

- always ask yourself, how else could I do this? (there's always another way);
- continually apply the phrase "if it ain't broke, break it" and see what happens;
- remember (as Miles Davis said), "there is no such thing as a wrong note";
- suspend judgement (work with what you've got; don't be too critical too soon);
- practice the art of improvisation (the exhilarating and perilous nature of engaging in an activity in which the future is largely unknown);
- switch off your autopilot;
- focus on solutions, not problems;
- cultivate a 'beginner's mind';
- always find opportunities to do some jamming (with people you know, and with complete strangers);
- practice the art of 'fusion', taking ideas that work well from elsewhere and fusing them with what you do;
- enhance your creativity by playing with random and unexpected inputs;
- learn how to get 'in the zone' and experience 'flow' in both work and play;
- make your organisational structures flatter (heterarchy not hierarchy);
- practise the art of distributed leadership.



# BECOMING ARTFUL

## Summary recommendations for artful practitioners in organisations

- Know that this work is for the long term
- Know that this work may be deeply transgressive for organisational culture over time.
- Define your own success criteria.
- Get used to being scape-goated, mildly ridiculed and held in high esteem... all at once...
- Remember that this is not just an “alternative” or “complementary” way of knowing. You are filling out the partiality of “rational” thinking, cultivating full spectrum knowing.
- Keep a firm grip on nourishing your own artful practice for yourself and with others.

## Key questions to ask if you are commissioning artful work

- To what extent will the participants be supported in their own creativity and imaginative space?
- Are participants bringing their own inquiries transparently into the work?
- Is it just a “taster” and/or what is the scope for getting depth and continuity for this work and understanding?
- Is it just entertainment?
- What depth of insight will your organisation tolerate?
- How prescriptive will the work be? To what extent will the outcomes be unknown and unknowable?
- What fears might you and others experience around this work?

## Encouragements to become more artful

- Broaden the bandwidth of what you notice – widen the boundary of what you consider relevant to your work. Use all your senses to do this.
- Ask yourself, what might be the simplest, smallest ways in which you can invite a fuller set of ways of knowing into your work? Might you allow yourself to doodle as well as write? Might you invite others to draw rich pictures to understand a system as well as talk about it? Might you make use of your own body as a source of valid information about a situation or problem?
- Like an engineer, a physicist, a surgeon or an artist, use drawing as a way of working things out and making ideas visible with others.
- How might you use images or music as well as words to stimulate thought and express ideas? For example, trying a presentation with only photography and no words.
- How might you use poetry or image to dwell in complex systems and understand them better?
- Use story to express complex ideas simply, to invite ways of reflecting rather than trying to drive a point home through bullet-point persuasion?
- When can you speaking from your own sensory and embodied experience?
- Dare to say what you’re feeling, and point to where you feel it...
- Use your body – perhaps just your hands – to shape your thoughts and make them visible. Get up. Move about.
- Collect images that seem meaningful about the situations that you are in and those you yearn for. Show them. Make collages.
- Link with nature – get walking – have talk and walk meetings with colleagues.



## INFORMING THEORIES

This work is informed by three sets of ideas which support and underpin this research. The first is John Heron and Peter Reason's seminal work on the "Extended Epistemology" which looks at valuing our coming to know in many different ways beyond the intellectual. The second is a piece of work Chris wrote with Peter Reason which digs further into one aspect of the Extended Epistemology; namely the movement from experiential knowing to presentational knowing. Third, we were inspired and informed by Tom Crompton's work at WWF, *Common Cause* which explores cultural values and our relationship to bigger-than-self problems (like climate change and biodiversity loss), self-interest and common-interest.

### Extended Epistemology

Western science has developed a very powerful form of inquiry based on rational (often mathematical) thought and empirical evidence. Yet we increasingly see the error of basing our theories on the myth of the rational economic man, as classical economics does. In focusing on the rational, we tend to ignore a wide range of other ways of knowing which include the experiential and intuitive, the aesthetic and presentational, the intersubjective and relational.

The myth of utility-maximising *homo economicus* strongly informs conventional organisation structures. On the surface of things, people tend to get rewarded most highly for working in their heads with ideas, concepts, money and numbers.

Action research, in common with contemporary qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), seeks to go beyond orthodox empirical and rational Western views of knowing, and assert a multiplicity of ways of knowing that start from

a relationship between self and other, through participation and intuition. They stress the importance of sensitivity and attunement in the moment of relationship, and of knowing it not just as an academic pursuit but as the everyday of acting in relationship and creating meaning in our lives (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:9).

For a theoretical framework, we draw specifically on the "Extended Epistemology" articulated by John Heron. His four interwoven ways of knowing (Heron 1992, 1999) reach beyond the confines of conventional intellectual positivism to embrace the pre-verbal, manifest and tacit knowings we might associate with artists, crafts people and our own guts and hearts and bodies. Heron says:

"Experiential knowing – imaging and feeling the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process or thing – is the ground of presentational knowing. Presentational knowing – an intuitive grasp of the significance of patterns as expressed in graphic, plastic, moving, musical and verbal art-forms – is the ground of propositional knowing. And propositional knowing – expressed in statements that something is the case – is the ground of practical knowing – knowing how to exercise a skill" (Heron 1999: 122).

Heron writes about these four ways of/to knowing both as a cycle (Heron, 1992: 174), in which each successive way of knowing builds on previous iterations of all different ways of knowing, and as an "up-hierarchy, with the ones higher in this list being grounded in those that are lower" (Heron, 1999: 3).

### Many ways of knowing

*Experiential knowing* arises in our everyday lived experience, through our encounter with our 'lifeworld'. It is the foundation of all knowing yet in many ways tacit and inaccessible to direct conscious awareness.

*Presentational knowing* grows out of experiential knowing, and provides the first form of expression through story, drawing, sculpture, movement, dance, drawing on aesthetic imagery. '...we come to experience the 'real world' in a manner that fits the stories we tell about it' (Bruner, 2002). This means that a powerful way of creating change is to portray things in new ways and find ways to tell new kinds of stories.

*Propositional knowing* draws on concepts and ideas and is the link between action research and scholarship. Theory can be a way of breaking with the common sense thinking that prevails in everyday life. The ability to develop alternative theories critical of everyday common sense grows out of in-depth examination of experience and new narratives.

*Practical knowing*, knowing-in-action, is what action researchers are looking for. Practical knowing is grounded in experience and narrative, is informed by theory and critical thinking, and is expressed through and in what we do. At the heart of practical knowing is an awareness of the quality of the practice in the moment. This is a form of embodied knowing beyond language and conceptual formulation.

Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2001

The full category of presentational knowing was a late addition to Heron's theory, encompassing intuition and reflection, imagination and conceptual thinking (Heron, 1992: 158). It was only through experiencing the value of coming to know the world in this way that he came to believe that presentational knowing "was valuable in its own right, not only as a bridge between experiential grounding and propositional knowing" (Heron, 1992: 175). Presentational knowing can be the least mediated (most immediate) way of knowing following direct experience. Heron (1992: 176) goes on to say:

"If we agree that presentational symbolism is indeed a mode of knowing, then we can no longer conveniently distance ourselves from its use by delegating it to the artistic community. We need to bring it right back into the mainstream knowledge quest."

Heron (1992: 165-168) further claims that:

"A person creates a pattern of perceptual elements – in movement, sound, colour, shape, line – to symbolise some deeper pattern that interconnects perceptual imagery of this world or other worlds. On this account of knowledge, art is a mode of knowledge. Presentational knowledge includes not only music and all the plastic arts, but dance, movement and mime. It also embraces all forms of myth, fable, allegory, story and drama, all of which require the use of language, and all of which involve the telling of a story. There is one overall point about presentational knowledge which is important for our understanding of the world. It reveals the underlying pattern of things."

Taking presentational knowing seriously means working with a healthy, dynamic interplay of all of the ways to knowing. Gregory Bateson (2000: 470) says:

"There are bridges between one sort of thought (intellectual) and the other (emotional), and it seems to me that the artists and poets are specifically concerned with these bridges. It is not that art is the expression of the unconscious, but rather that it is concerned with the relation between the levels of mental process. Artistic skill is the combining of many levels of mind – unconscious, conscious and external – to make a statement of their combination."

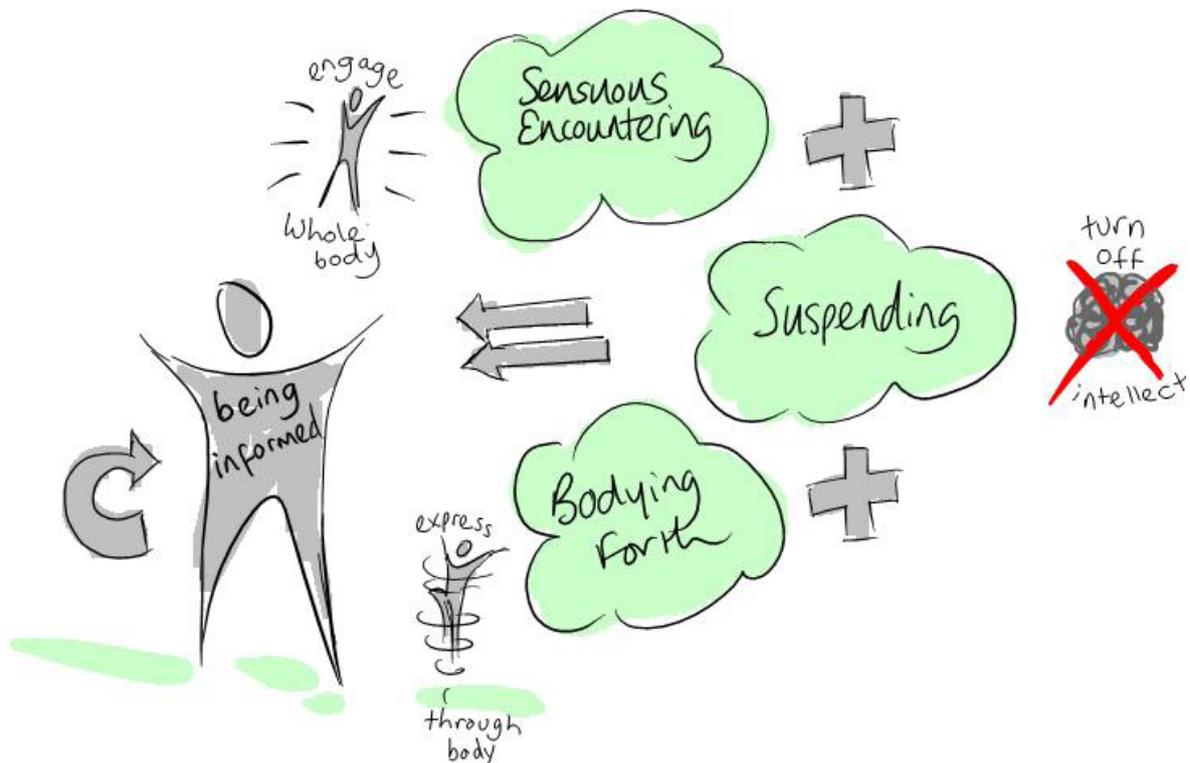
We wonder how organisations would be if all the ways of knowing were allowed to inform and shape their structure.

### Expressions of Energy

What is the lived experience of artful knowing? Drawing on the ideas of the extended epistemology, *Expressions of Energy* (Seeley & Reason, 2008) focuses on the relationship between experiential knowing and presentational knowing and offers a four-step process bridging the two. Here, the movement from receiving to responding is explored in depth, offering insights gained from experience into how artful knowing works – whether the response is musical, visual, sculptural or poetic.

#### 4-step process of Artful Knowing

- 1) Sensuous encountering
- 2) Suspending
- 3) Bodying-forth
- 4) Being in-formed



### Sensuous encountering

Sensuous encountering means using all our ways of sensing to directly experience the world with a whole-body curiosity and appreciation for that which is being experienced.

Here, messy, rich direct experience where we are a part of our complex, creative planet is the grounding for all our other ways to knowing (whether we like it or not). Without experiencing and acknowledging an earthy, sensuous rootedness in the world around us, we run the risk of perpetuating the disconnected, objectifying intellectualisation that keeps us apart from the wider world. Organisational life tends to shield us from such messy realities and reduces the range of sensory experiences we encounter. Philosopher, *John Dewey (1958: 47)* suggests that we might have choices about the ways in which we receive our experiences in the world. He says that such direct experience can be aesthetic and relates it to the ways in which we appreciate tasty food:

*"It is gusto, taste; and, as with cooking, overt skilful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer".*

What, then, if we were to ground our experience of the world in a gastronomic stance of gratitude, enjoyment, savouring and restraint?

What choices can we make about the experiences we immerse ourselves in? Psychologist *Laura Sewall (2000: 85-90)* warns that:

*"Without awareness of the body's response to each place and moment, our experience is little more than a 'view from nowhere.' With our senses cut off from a deep engagement with the colors and sounds of a dense and vibrant life-world, we become increasingly disembodied."*

By re-engaging our senses, even in circumstances we can not change, we build a foundation for our responses to the world. With a sensuous engagement with experience, we have a rich compost to work with as such foundational experience begins to quicken into response.

### Suspending

Suspending means hanging fire with fresh rounds of clever intellectual retorts in order to become more deeply acquainted with the responses to experience of our more-than-brainy bodies to the contexts we are in. Psychotherapist *Jerome Bernstein* calls it:

*"holding one's intellectual and rational breath."* (*Living in the Borderland, 2005, p73*). It has become normal in organisational life to leap to a decision, to collapse complex situations into a single reality as quickly as possible. Even suggesting that decision-making is held open for the first half of a day-long meeting can lead to anxiety.

Poised at the edge of the realm of experiential knowing where our senses and imagination meet, we run the risk of the intellect prematurely rushing in with a show of certainty, planning, and a quick answer to dispel the anxiety of dwelling in complexity and unknowing.

Using *Heron's* theory, we see that such a rushed response represents a jump from experiential knowing straight to propositional knowing, whilst bypassing presentational knowing altogether. This over-valuing of propositional knowing comes at the expense of potentially subtler, richer and more complex presentational knowing. *Goethe* (in *Naydler, 1996: 85*) wrote:

*"throughout the history of scientific investigation, we find observers leaping too quickly from phenomenon to theory, hence they fall short of the mark and become theoretical."*

Suspending is a process of allowing non-intellectual space both for wise, essential knowing to distil from complex situations and at the same time for a rich diversity knowing to proliferate. Through suspending the intellect, and dwelling in uncertainty in this way, we open ourselves to receive inspiration. It is an effort of “holding back of our own activity – a form of receptive attentiveness that offers the phenomenon a chance to express its own gesture” (Brook, 1998: 56). Such holding back requires discipline and sensitive process design.

Suspending, then, as a foundational element of presentational knowing, is about connection and about coming to detect, discern and pay attention to our whole body responses to experience and context. Without paying attention to gathering the wisps of our emotions, there’s a kind of sleepy deadness and passivity which dulls expression.

### **Bodying-forth**

Bodying-forth means inviting imaginative impulses to express themselves through the medium of my body without my intellect throwing a spanner in the works and crushing those responses with misplaced rationality or premature editing and critique.

Here, we seek to articulate the process of making manifest that which we have come to know through the previous two stages of sensuous encountering and suspending. Bodying-forth is the fruit of suspension, which may be spontaneous, or it may be a combination of spontaneity and planning. Artist and educator, MC Richards (1964: 116) suggests a combination of “ready vision and groping” for this part of the process.

This aspect of presentational knowing can operate within the body as gestures (glances, blushes, sighs and held breath etc), and through the body, mediated by the materials and tools used as channels for expression (paper and pencils, clay, singing, dancing). Both are routinely dismissed and devalued in conventional organisational life.

### **Being in-formed**

Being in-formed means becoming a being whose living and actions form and are in-formed by the rich experiences, surprises, provocations and evocations of presentational knowing, both as a perceiver and as a creator.

If we are in-formed on a daily basis by two-dimensional emails, dualistic thought processes, planning, time management and report writing, then how are we ever going to develop and grow our sensory and emotional capacity to respond to the challenges we face in any way other than more reports, emails and abstractions?

Our states of being affect each other in virtuous and vicious circles of mutual reflection and influence. How we form and in-form our living in turn influences and patterns our responses to the world.

### **Common Cause**

In 2011, WWF produced a report, *Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values*, which encourages organisational professionals (initially in the context of civil society campaigning but now in an increasing set of contexts) to consider the implications of their work for what they called “bigger-than-self” problems such as global poverty, climate change and biodiversity loss. The report suggests that such organisations may be inadvertently undermining their own purposes and messages by appealing to self-interest and consumerist (“extrinsic”) values. To take a business example, it seems clear that the basic assumptions of the banking industry need to change to a more social model, and yet through a culture of financial bonus and share options, banking perpetuates the lure of extrinsic values and self-interested behaviours.

The report’s author, Tom Crompton, says that appealing to “extrinsic values” (such as financial reward, material success and acquisition) promotes unhelpful behaviour in the long run because such values are correlated with low levels of concern with bigger-than-

self problems. He suggests that appealing instead to “intrinsic values” (like community feeling, affiliation to friends and family and self-development) on the contrary stimulates a high level of concern with bigger-than-self issues and is less self-interested.

Whilst the commercial art world may turn on its own notions of material success and celebrate fame, we contend that in and of itself, artful practice activates and strengthens our sense of “intrinsic values” and concern for bigger-than-self issues. We felt that the *Common Cause* report offers a firm basis for

conceptualising artful knowing as a practice which welcomes, stimulates and invites bigger-than-self considerations and deeper (“intrinsic”) values rather than shoring up business-as-usual. We believe that this is the case whether or not businesses and organisations allow and welcome challenges to their underlying structures and norms. By consciously developing artful knowing, an organisation can shift its dominant culture in favour of intrinsic values, and through this become more aware of its own deep assumptions and maybe start to question them and imagine a different future in the common interest.

# TAKING AN ACTION RESEARCH(-Y) APPROACH

As part of the Ashridge Centre for Action Research (ACAR), we are undertaking this Artful Organisation research in the spirit of action research – practice-oriented research *with* rather than *on* people. Both Ellie and Chris are seasoned action researchers committed to participatory ways of generating new knowledge. Action research is a form of research carried out by people on their own work and/or lives, sometimes with the help of an external facilitator. It aims to create a better understanding of the situation or problem being studied, and to change it for the better in the process. It is grounded in the fundamental assumption that the best way to understand a situation is to participate in it.

Action research is rather different from other forms of academic research in that it is not trying to create generalisable findings, but rather it aims to be of use to practitioners by solving problems, answering questions, developing new practices and developing new understanding.

*"A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives. A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being – economic, political, psychological, spiritual – of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part."*  
(Reason P & Bradbury H, *Handbook of Action Research*, Sage Publications, 2001, p2)

*"We cannot regard truth as a goal of inquiry. The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring consensus on the end to be achieved and the means to be used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve co-ordination of behaviour is not inquiry but simply wordplay."*  
(Rorty, R. *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin Books, 1999: pxxv)

In this Artful Organisation research, we have sought to respond to five dimensions of action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001):

## 1. Worthwhile purposes

We come to this work with a strong and explicit interest in encouraging new organisational structures to develop that are more systemically sensitive and less oriented toward unsustainable, destructive and unfair uses of the ecosystems that sustain us.

## 2. Emergent form

Our core research question has been explored in many different settings and formats during this project. We have not always known in advance what there will be, and we have not known the outcomes of the research in advance of the exploration.

## 3. Practical challenges

We chose to concentrate our research on established practitioners in the field of artful organisation. We wanted to draw on their (and our) body of experience to gain depth and inform future practice.

## 4. Many ways of knowing

Whilst this research is about many ways of knowing, we also adopted many ways of knowing in our research process, ranging

from image making and movement to storytelling, film-making and photography. We have used our own intellects and intuition in making sense of the huge amount of “data” we have gathered and we have asked our co-researchers to speak from the heart as well as from the head.

### 5. Participation and democracy

We have engaged actively with and as practitioners of artful knowing. There are as many voices in here as there are thoughts and experiences of our own, seeking others’ perspectives whilst holding our responsibility as primary sense makers. We wanted this loose group of participants to start to understand themselves as leaders in a coherent field of practice; to feel a sense of belonging and being heard; and to contribute toward creating new knowledge together.

Action research is not simply a methodology and our research process has been comprehensive and widespread – an inquiry over time which will not finish with the publication of this report. We have each been curiously engaged with the deeply significant questions asked in the research in service of a better world. Over the course of this research, we have engaged in the following research activities:

- Initial discussions with practitioners and commissioners of this work in the context of Ashridge Business School.
- Ongoing sense-making and theorising discussions with each other and with practitioners on the meaning of Artful Organisation.
- With our colleague Chris Nichols, we have hosted a workshop at Schumacher College in the UK on Artful Organisation in November 2011, which had 15 participants, and another a year later called “Tell Me Another Story” on storytelling, framing and sustainability, which had 20 participants.
- We have explored our research questions in depth with 16 practitioners in the UK and the USA;

- Chris Seeley wrote a thought piece for and presented a participatory plenary event on “Artful Knowing for A Sustainable Future” at the Ashridge Conference on Sustainable Business in June 2011.
- Attendance at Creativity & Business Conference: Connectivity, Values and Interventions, 12 March 2012, The British Library, London.
- Creation of an Artful inquiry in June 2013 with participants from Europe, North and South America. Gloucestershire, UK.
- We have also conducted a broad review of relevant literature sources.

These multiple, practical sources of data from lived experience offer validity and quality to our research. We think it is important that this practical everyday knowing has been built on solid, lived experience rather than relying on solely intellectual ideas.

## CODA

"Through artful knowing, playing my violin, I have transferred learning from one part of my life to another to develop a sensibility to the pattern which connects. Through experimentation with artistic process, and using violin playing to explore the intersections between art and work, music has become a medium through which I can challenge my assumptions and explore new ways of knowing and making meaning. Process and relationships fascinate me, and the coming together of 'me' as a whole through artistic process has flowed through all areas of my life. This 'wholeness' leads me to an increased awareness of my place within the system."

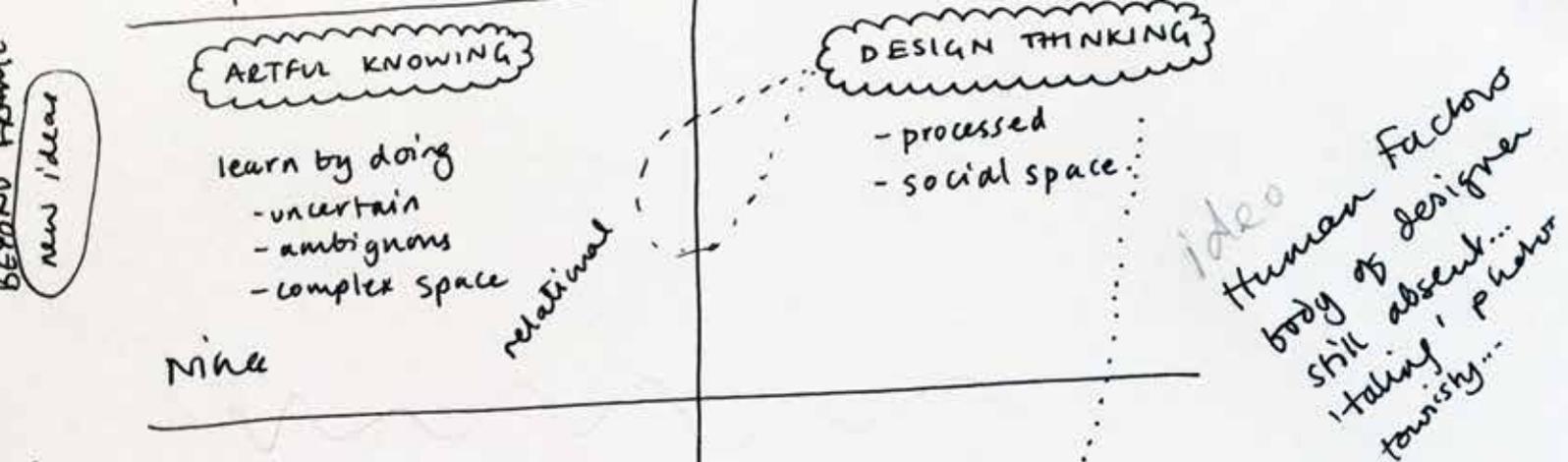
... I'm playing a piece at the moment which requires me to let the bow free-fall through the air onto the string. This movement is terrifying, it just doesn't feel right. I notice my fear of letting go, of losing control. I don't just experience this feeling in my head though; I feel it throughout my body, through my fingers, my arms and back. I see the pattern between this process of play, situations at work and in other areas of my life, and also more widely in our world."

Visitor to "Artful Organisation" event at Schumacher College.

After presenting this material, along with some embodied group work from Interplay ([www.interplay.org](http://www.interplay.org)), we compiled this list of "rational" reasons why expanding our ways of knowing is essential to shape a future where we and the ecosystems of which we are a part can flourish with quality, diversity and – as deep ecologist Arne Naess says – self realisation:

- Cultivating imagination on an everyday basis;
- Seeing the patterns that connect;
- Systemic thinking and acting;
- Relational practice;
- Re/establishing emotional attachment with the world around us;
- Re/membering ourselves as just "plain members of the biotic community": (Aldo Leopold);
- Cultivating ourselves as body-intellectuals as well as mind-intellectuals (realising our creaturely bodies as reliable sources of information);
- Recognising and knowing the non-human.

Finally... these kinds of expansive practices are rare in organisational life, beyond taster and one-off sessions. Anything we can do to broaden the bandwidth of our consciousness, knowing and understanding on an everyday basis must surely be welcome at this time of unprecedented turbulence. Start anywhere... and keep going.



repackaging existing  
decorating  
savouring  
compensating

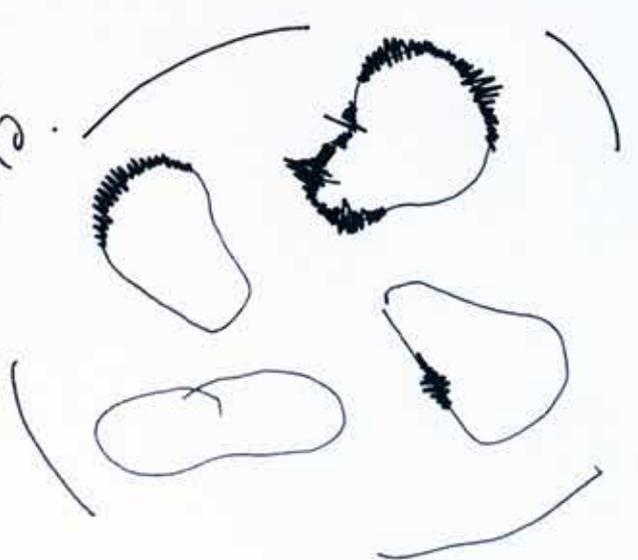
ENTERTAINMENT & INSPIRATION

DESIGN - BAD BRANDS?  
AESTHETIC / ARTIFACT / IMAGE  
(design with big D)  
CONSUMERIST  
ART - revived, specialist etc.

grounded in 'emotion/sensing'      grounded in intellect

WAYS OF KNOWING (either creative & analytical or  
'creative - experientially based' v' analytically based.)  
→ for more SUSTAINABLE BIZ  
eco/ethical.

2x2's  
horrible!  
Another way  
to diagram?  
What kind of image  
should this be? - Not  
rigid grid.



Two possible 2x2. - what focus.../story

① Mapping field of 'organisational ways of knowing'  
- what does that imply - the org bit? team? collaborative  
or collective... 'WE NEED TO EXPAND OUR CAPACITY FOR KNOWING'

② Mapping 'uses of 'artful ways' within  
organisations... Ashida - social constructivist. / discourse

# A MANIFESTO FOR ARTFUL ORGANISATION

## ARTFUL ORGANISATIONS...

Cultivate knowing in many ways,  
in our hearts and guts as well as our minds and intellects

Allow people to cultivate their own imaginations and creative responses

Dare to challenge the deep underlying assumptions  
shaping how organisations act, artfully constructing new realities

Are courageous in showing vulnerability and unknowing

Expect, encourage and support their people in cultivating their own  
artful practices as a way of being and living

Welcome and value messy, inarticulate, heartfelt responses and  
explorations

Develop the courage to have fierce conversations

Dare to be guided by what is elegant and beautiful more than that  
which is efficient and expedient

Allow, expect and encourage people to dwell in and reflect on  
experience before making decisions

Value lived experience and practical knowing

Encourage multiple forms of expression, not just talking and writing

Operate more from the generative basis of love than the reactivity of fear

Will work persistently with artful knowing to provoke, question,  
disrupt and deepen thinking in preference to entertaining, decorating  
and soothing



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## CONTRIBUTORS

### Dr Chris Seeley

I have worked with business service and economic development organisations in the UK, US, Africa and Asia. My deep involvement with sustainability issues highlighted the need for our species to come to know the world in many different ways – including ‘presentational knowing’ or arts-based practice. I use the visual arts, storytelling, clowning, improvisation, interplay and forum theatre in my practice and articulate this interweaving of concerns in my unconventional PhD – *Wild Margins: Playing at Work and Life* – exploring the overlapping relationship between purposeful work and arts-based practice. I co-direct the Ashridge Masters in Sustainability and Responsibility (AMSR) and am part of the faculty for the Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change (ADOC). I am a practising visual artist and occasional performer.

[chris@wildmargins.com](mailto:chris@wildmargins.com)

[www.wildmargins.com](http://www.wildmargins.com)

[www.ashridge.org.uk/amsr](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/amsr)

[www.ashridge.org.uk/adoc](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/adoc)



### Ellen Thornhill

As an independent consultant I work with start-ups or venture units within large corporates, bringing innovation expertise to all phases of the entrepreneurial cycle. I rely heavily on creative and imaginative ways of working, complementing the more data driven, analytical approaches typically used by many of my clients.

[ellenthornhill@gmail.com](mailto:ellenthornhill@gmail.com)



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All research quotations in this report are therefore unattributed. Participants also consented to be listed at the end of the report. Based in the UK, Brazil, Germany, India, Slovenia and the US, they work with people in business and are experienced consultants, dancers, film makers, improvisers, musicians, photographers, poets, researchers, storytellers, visual artists, writers and every delightful combination of the above. If we have omitted anyone, we apologise.

**Dr Cathryn Lloyd**

Maverick Minds Pty Ltd

**Marcelo Michelsohn****William Ayot**

Poet, keynote speaker, coach and poet in residence. [www.williamayot.com](http://www.williamayot.com)

**Peter Blackett** MPhil

Drummer. [www.umbanda.co.uk](http://www.umbanda.co.uk)

**Simon Craft-Stanley****Martin Gent**

Director of Creativity, Spinach Ltd.  
[www.spinach.co.uk](http://www.spinach.co.uk)

**Elinor Gibson****Mark Harmer**

Insights through Collaborative Music.  
[markharmer@aol.com](mailto:markharmer@aol.com)

**Sue Hollingsworth**

Director of the International School of Storytelling.  
Storyteller, coach and consultant.  
[www.schoolofstorytelling.com](http://www.schoolofstorytelling.com)

**Sky Jaffe****Rory MacLeod****Terri McNerney****Marieluise Maiwald****Dr Steve Marshall**

[photo-dialogue.com](http://photo-dialogue.com)

**Dr Geoff Mead**

Director, Centre for Narrative Leadership.  
[www.narrativeleadership.org](http://www.narrativeleadership.org)

**Masood Naik****Chris Nichols**

Artful knowing in Organisational Consulting and Development Practitioner  
[www.groundedcreativity.com](http://www.groundedcreativity.com)  
[www.gameshift.co.uk](http://www.gameshift.co.uk)

**Viv Nelson**

Nelson Training. [www.nelsontraining.co.uk](http://www.nelsontraining.co.uk)

**Sally Palethorpe****Nick Parker****Dr Doug Paxton****Dr Nika Newcomb Quirk**

Artful Practitioner. [www.nikaquirk.com](http://www.nikaquirk.com)

**Mel Risebrow****Michelle Seymour****Paul Z Jackson****Dr Shoshana Simons**

California Institute of Integral Studies.  
[www.ciis.edu/academics/faculty/shoshana\\_simons\\_bio.html](http://www.ciis.edu/academics/faculty/shoshana_simons_bio.html)

**Claus Springborg**

[cocreation.dk](http://cocreation.dk)

**Klara Stanic****Alex Steele**

Founding Director, Improvise.  
[www.improvise.co.uk](http://www.improvise.co.uk)

**Peter Thompson**

Shedlight Productions. [www.shedlightproductions.co.uk](http://www.shedlightproductions.co.uk)

**Daniella Vega****Dr Barbara Turner-Vesselago**

[www.freefallwriting.com](http://www.freefallwriting.com)

**Cynthia Winton-Henry**

[www.interplay.org](http://www.interplay.org)

**Emily Wilkinson MA**

Visual facilitator and artist.  
[www.mindfulmaps.com](http://www.mindfulmaps.com)

**Alan Woods** OBE

*Chris says: thank you also to Kathy Skerritt and James Aldridge for all those other discussions about artful knowing, ecology, beauty and life.*



Research Department  
Ashridge Business School  
Berkhamsted  
Hertfordshire HP4 1NS  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)1442 841178  
Email: [research@ashridge.org.uk](mailto:research@ashridge.org.uk)  
[www.ashridge.org.uk/research](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/research)

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