



“How can organisations ...reimagine their role, their relationships and themselves for a sustainable future?” (Dr Chris Seeley, 2011)

“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” (Albert Einstein)

How much do we use our creative faculties in the way we work together in organisations? How much do we use imagination in understanding sustainability? How much do we rely purely on logical thinking and intellect? Do we limit ourselves in doing as we do?

The way we work in relationship with ourselves and each other, and with the wider group, whether that be family, our work environment, our local community or on the wider world stage, has got to be a crucial sustainability question – what makes it to the table and why and what happens as a result will affect all of us, human and non-human alike.

If we are one sided in our approach, how much do we miss? I think it is true to say that the West has a preference for rational, logical arguments presented as scientific fact. We address concerns for the environment in reports and only admit logical, scientific thinking to the sustainability questions. Yet at the same time we have all experienced wonder of a great piece of music, or been awestruck by the magnificence of Nature. Art, like Nature, connects us to something bigger than ourselves. In doing so it opens up sources and resources beyond our thinking capacity. Artful expression sits at a pre verbal ‘intuitive grasp’ level of knowing (see John Heron’s *presentational knowing*), a most mysterious and fascinating spot that really has the capacity to broaden our understanding before it becomes crystallised and fixed into logic and words. It opens possibilities which our rational, logical intellects alone could not begin to reach. It helps us to reimagine how we might interact and work together in ways not yet considered.

The late Dr Chris Seeley along with her close colleague Chris Nichols, previously Professor of Practice in Systems Leadership at Ashridge Business School, spent many years developing "Artful Knowing" as an organisational intervention .

On her Wild Margins website Dr Seeley says:

“The issue we collectively face is one of imagination as much as one of ingenuity, 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?" (Seeley C)

Seeley and Nichols ran several workshops for practitioners at Schumacher College and Ashridge, helping people to place artful knowing centrally in their work, not as an ice-breaker or team building exercise but as a legitimate form of knowing, a richer source of data. This is known as working with an extended epistemology.

Bill McKibben's wonderful book "Deep Economy" also makes the point that communities taking steps towards a durable future tend also to embrace art. He cites a few – for example word is spread about the Bengali 'New Farming Movement' by songs sung at local markets; while in the Himalayan village Shimong, locals tackle issues of overhunting not only through wildlife surveys, but through an awareness campaign involving writing songs with lyrics about the sacred mountain (McKibben, 2007).

So it seems that it is not a case of either or, but of broadening our perception of admissible ways of working and of recognising the power of more artful interactions and methods used alongside the more traditional ones. After all the advertising industry has long recognised the power of story-telling, visual imagery and music. Yet we don't see it as a channel open to us to access for our own purposes. We forget that we are all connected to the same source -and ideas may pop up anywhere and through anyone. Working together with others or alone with art is also fun, which is something often in short supply people's working environments.

There are various ways to bring artful practice into work. A start might be to use a graphic facilitator for a strategy meeting perhaps - maybe someone in the team fancies a go, or engage a professional. See how the unfolding results change and support the meeting. Alternatively a professional storyteller could help weave the narrative of the organisation or team, strengthening relationships.

Or get messy and try some DIY: consider a course of action artfully by drawing the question or problem on a large piece of flip chart paper and then drawing possible solutions. Collage, cut, colour, scribe. What feels best? What colours do you like? Which outcome looks best to you? You may be surprised with what you learn.

Extending this work to teams is a next step and may be best facilitated by an artful practitioner, but it holds the promise of surprising breakthroughs and unpredictable results. There are experienced practitioners in this field who can facilitate sessions for artful knowing from Jazz and movement work to storytelling.

Business is innovating and I would contend is more than ready to embrace this step.

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Since 2011 Chris Nichols has convened a collaborations be group of practice around Artful Organisation. The group is now run through a collaborative hub of practice called GameShift - www.gameshift.co.uk