

Leadership as Artistry

A Perspective Whose Time Has Come



January 2010, Vol. 1, Issue 1

By: Ipek Serifsoy

During the past few years, a new perspective on leadership has been seeping into the business community. This perspective, which can be called **Leadership as Artistry**, recognizes and leverages the preconscious, preverbal processes that are associated with the right brain. By integrating nonlinear, intuitive and imaginative ways of operating—normally associated with artists—business leaders can attain greater innovativeness, collaboration, and resilience in themselves and others.

Daniel Pink first introduced the power of right brain thinking to the mainstream in 2005.

His highly successful book, *A Whole New Mind: Moving From the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, built a case for the importance of right brain thinking in today's high tech global economy, where much of what we have traditionally considered high-value contributions are commoditized and off-shored. In coining and describing the Conceptual Age, Pink explains how we now need greater capacities in creativity and empathy to succeed. He describes the need for high concept and high touch abilities, defining these ideas in the following ways:

High concept: involves the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into a novel invention.

High touch: involves the ability to empathize, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the habitual in pursuit of purpose and meaning. ¹



The evolution of society: from the agricultural to the industrial to the knowledge to the conceptual age

Since the publication of Pink's book, there has been a proliferation of books and articles that point to the same perspective. This outpouring of literature coincides with a felt need within the business world for greater innovation, collaboration, and resilience during these times of greatly accelerated change. In addition, the business world is beginning to detect the value in this new way of thinking. This is supported by the efforts of highly acclaimed business schools to revamp their MBA programs in order to foster integrative thinking, and enable future managers and executives to access the creative and empathic right brain.

While the efforts of corporations and business schools to build right brain capacities has been noteworthy, their approach has been largely an intellectual, cognitive left-brain oriented endeavor. *(See a comparison of right brain and left brain in Appendix A.)* It is my belief that the pathway to accessing and leveraging right brain intelligence lies in finding methods in accordance with the holistic ways of the more experientially-oriented right brain.

To access and activate our right brain, we need to suspend our conditioned left brain orientation.

As Jill Boyte Taylor—a brain scientist who watched herself having a stroke in her left hemisphere—explains, the right brain engages very differently than the left brain. To the right mind, the only time that exists is the present moment—whereas the left mind thinks about the past and future.² This immersion in the present moment, this sense of timelessness, is where the fruits of the right brain can be found. To access and activate the right brain, we need to suspend our conditioned left brain orientation. We need to set aside our rationality, words, analysis, and our ability to evaluate, classify, dissect, categorize, define and be logical. We need to shed our self-consciousness. The slightest interference from the dominant left brain breaks the flow of right brain thinking. For example, when we start asking ourselves “What am I doing?,” “Am I doing this well?,” “Is this the experience I should be having?,” we immediately shift into left brain mode.

Accessing right brain intelligence is a tricky endeavor given the dominance of our left brain. The left brain is the side that reads, writes, spells and talks, and endlessly attempts to be a gatekeeper of the information allowed into our consciousness from the right brain. Most efforts to elicit right brain thinking rely on the left brain, and thus only yield results capable of passing the scrutiny of the left brain.

The good news? There is a way to access right brain thinking.

The bad news is, it's a methodology our left brain will reject as not intellectual enough, thus making it hard to value according to left brain criteria.

The method I am referring to is called **Creative Expression** [also known as Expressive Arts]. This next statement may surprise many people: human beings are hard-wired to be creators and artists. Art and creativity help distinguish us as human beings. Creative Expression is a way of engaging our creative selves and accessing right brain intelligence while operating under the radar of the left brain.

Creative Expression is a process that draws upon the integrative and connective powers

of art. By engaging in visual art, music, poetry, movement, etcetera, we connect with our inner artist. In doing so, we simultaneously connect our inner and outer worlds as we participate in a continual dance between inner imagining and outer form. Creative Expression merges the inner worlds of the unconscious and conscious with the external world of the situations we encounter. It enables us to express the wordless and complex, and to work with paradoxes and mysteries, holding together and integrating more information than we can grasp with our rational mind. In doing so, Creative Expression produces new knowledge. It acts as a portal to new insights and perspectives, and—through the emergence of images, symbols, and signs—it gives voice to the brilliant perspective of the right brain. As we engage and express the rich resources hidden in the unconscious, we awaken our imagination and ability to notice and care about what is happening in the world around us. This new understanding is the shift that underpins innovation, collaboration and resilience.

On a final note, it's important to emphasize that my advocacy is not about the superiority of the right brain over the left brain.

Rather, it's about the need to bring these complementary sides into greater equilibrium and balance. From a neuroscientific perspective, we achieve optimal mental processing when both sides are working together. This said, given the current state of our modern values, our conditioned mode of operating tends to favor the dominant left brain that silences the right brain.

In future articles we will delve further into this topic by introducing ways to access right brain perceptions and achieve higher levels of creativity and empathy. We will dive deeper into understanding how Creative Expression enhances leadership effectiveness in today's world, and we'll continue to explore what it means to approach Leadership as Artistry.

¹ Pink (2005, p. 51-52) ² Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*

Artistry is an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing, though different in crucial aspects from our standard model of professional knowledge. It is not inherently mysterious; it is rigorous in its own terms.

~ Donald Schön ~

As an executive coach and organizational consultant, Ipek Serifsoy helps leaders bridge the conventional and emergent worlds of business to become more effective in setting and realizing their goals. Since 1995, Ipek has been working with individual executives and teams at some of the most innovative and successful organizations in the world, including Adobe, Agilent, Applied Materials, BEA Systems, Banker's Trust, Chevron, Genentech, Pfizer, Estee Lauder, McKesson, Oracle, Pacific Bell, Qualcomm, Revlon, and Wells Fargo. Ipek's generative coaching style leverages the principles of dialogue, cognitive linguistics, positive psychology, emotional intelligence, and cooperative and appreciative inquiry. It's a holistic approach that reflects her unique resume, which started with ten years on Wall Street—engaged in mergers and acquisitions, private placements and investment management. **WEB:** www.isconsultingco.com **EMAIL:** ipek@isconsultingco.com



Appendix A

The chart below describes the hemispheric differences commonly ascribed to the left brain and right brain.

Left Brain	Right Brain
Verbal	Visual
Analytic (sees details and parts)... sees "the trees"	Big Picture (sees the gestalt and the interrelated whole)... sees "the forest"
Reads the lines	Reads between the lines
Controls and listens to the content of what is said	Controls and hears the way (the tone and manner) in which something is said
Symbolic (reduces things to symbols)	Concrete (sees things as they really exist)
Abstract	Realistic
Temporal (keeps track of time)	Timeless (loses track of time)
Rational	Creative and imaginative
Logical	Intuitive
Linear	Global
Objective	Subjective
Focused	Diffuse
Interprets literally	Understands/provides context
Plans and schedules	Improvises and flows
Is about separation and distinction	Is about connectedness and permeability
Enjoys observing	Enjoys experience and sensory input
Predicts the future based on past experiences	Immersed in the present moment; unconcerned with the past or future
Intellectually oriented	Socially and emotionally astute
Sequential: processes ideas step-by-step	Simultaneous: processes ideas all at once
Utility bound	Aesthetically savvy
Tends to make lists and follow rules	Tends to free associate and free flow
Facts oriented	Story oriented
Detached	Empathetic
The Editor: edits based on what we expect to see or what we decide we have seen	Holistic: sees raw, unedited data; takes in great chunks of things and instantly processes them

