

A brief Q&A with our three panelists

Following the presentations by [Diane Ragsdale](#), [John Dobson](#) and [John Michael Schert](#), UW-Madison's [John Surdyk](#) facilitated a panel discussion. Because there was limited time to delve into some of the questions Surdyk had prepared, in the week following the symposium, each of the panelists were sent a question and given a chance to weigh in via email.

John Surdyk: Are there elements of the artistic or creative process you use that speak to the acceptance of this ambiguity – or at least a reconciliation with it? For example, how do you select what brush stroke, dance step or other expression to choose over another when you have multiple choices that may technically fulfill the requirements of a head roll, etc? Can elements of your technique be taught to business leaders? To what effect? Experience? Prediction?

John Michael Schert: The power of a creative process is that it can intuitively see and understand much of what is happening in the moment. The ability to see, perceive, decipher and metabolize can all be done in a moment. The result, the product per se, is the result of the distillation of so many data points, factors, emotions, senses, details and demands. The product is not necessarily 'right' or 'wrong' in a quantitative sense, but measured more along the lines of: Is it true? Is it honest? Is it interesting? Is it moving forward the ideas and the reasons? Ambiguity is a key element of this creative process in that there is great uncertainty in every step, for to be done well, there is a great amount of listening/empathy involved, equal to the amount of telling and doing. Intrinsic inspiration measured against extrinsic constraints.

This process can be taught to business leaders, for I believe they are already experiencing ambiguity and the unknown daily. The creative process helps them better makes sense of, and intuitively decipher (with great rigor and discipline) so many factors and arrive at novel conclusions customized to the situation at hand.

John Surdyk: How do we foster a comfort among leaders with decision-making under conditions of ambiguity where economic or moral reasoning alone may be insufficient? How do we help leaders become comfortable with a type of judgement supported by reason but where the reasons cannot amount to a deductive argument?

John Dobson: The question assumes that 'leaders' are uncomfortable about this. But people make decisions all the time on foundations that would extend beyond economic and moral reasoning, if necessary. And aesthetics-based decisions can always be justified in terms of the economic or moral; these are not mutually exclusive or conflicting categories.

Regarding Heidegger, the premise of my 'Dwelling Poetically' argument is that we, as human beings, naturally gravitate to a mode of decision-making that embraces the moral, economic, and aesthetic. Modernism has tended to 'un-naturally' exclude – or at least suppress - the aesthetic. As we trend into post-modernism, however, the balance will naturally be restored. Thus teaching art in business schools can be justified as a true reflection of a broad socio-cultural shift: a shift from instrumental rationality's dominance toward a balance of the instrumental, moral, and aesthetic.

John Surdyk: How are artists and business leaders alike? Are there similar aptitudes to discern patterns in data or phenomena or other abilities (improvisation, etc.) that they share which suggest a place to begin with pedagogy?

Diane Ragsdale: The course I taught at UW-Madison was an effort to help students develop a different way of knowing, doing, and being than they normally encounter in the standard business school curriculum. Having said this, I would characterize it as, essentially, a course in human development. It

was grounded in a belief that we are all quite capable of approaching work and life in this different way. For instance, business leaders rely on their intuitions, at times, to make decisions. However, in a business school, a sensory approach to decision-making may be given less emphasis or credence than other methods.

John Surdyk: What would it take to embrace beauty and artistry (or aesthetic judgement) in addition to traditional economic analysis in a business school setting? What institutional policies, etc. have helped/hindered efforts at Cal Poly/Booth/UW-Madison?

John Michael Schert: Get out of your own way. Recognize beauty, artistry and aesthetic judgement are already a part of our daily lives; part of the human experience. Allow reason and traditional economic analysis to still be one of the lenses used to evaluate a situation, but not the only lens. Allow space for the unknown. This might translate to not scheduling every moment of your day, but allowing for a periods of unstructured thought and reflection (walks, an inviolate hour on the calendar each day). It might mean having discipline to begin each day with reflection and an appreciation of art, beauty and nature (Maslow's 6th level) BEFORE reaching for your device with its extrinsic demands and reminders (schedule, calendar, inbox, minor and major catastrophes that require you to become the person necessary to fix/solve them). It might mean 'getting lost' (as Diane so beautifully teaches in her Beauty Course).

John Dobson: At Cal Poly I have yet to try to initiate any integration of art into business education. I imagine I could probably get an elective class in say 'Beauty in Business' approved. But as far as convincing other business faculty to include 'art' in their regular business classes, that could be a 'hard sell' (to use a business analogy).

Diane Ragsdale: From my experience at UW-Madison I would have to agree with John Dobson that beauty is a hard sell to the typical business school faculty (beyond its association with marketing and the design of products and services). We've just completed a course for 22 undergraduate business majors. While it appears to have been quite successful with the students, there does not seem to be much buy-in across the business school faculty for the idea that beauty should be a priority. However, business students are, arguably, no more in need of beauty than engineering, journalism, medical, or any other types of student at a university. Perhaps it would be easier to sell the idea of beauty as important to all students—on the basis that it can be a pathway to social responsibility, human development, creative development, or leadership development—than to sell the idea of beauty as particularly important for business students.