

Leadership Artistry: Daring to Care

Nancy J. Adler*

McGill University



"The soul craves beauty. Yet our world languishes in ugliness."¹

-John O'Donohue

Ojibway Elder Dr. Art Solomon expresses the yearning of the Anishinabe People of Canada²

*Grandfather
Sacred One,
Teach us love, compassion, and honor
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other*

In the vocabulary of twenty-first century management, that same yearning would be labeled "daring to care" – leadership that recognizes that the world is our ultimate client.³

Such yearning is not just the fervent desire of the aboriginal peoples of North America. Expressed in Hebrew, the goal of each person, whether Jewish or not, is *Tikun Olam* – to repair the world.⁴ Surprisingly, at least from our twenty-first century perspective, one of the words for compassion in ancient Hebrew, *Tiferet*, also means beauty.⁵ The invitation to compassion that became the focus of the 2010 Academy of Management Meetings in

* Nancy Adler is the Bronfman Chair in Management at McGill University, Desautels Faculty of Management, 1001 rue Sherbrooke ouest, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 1G5. (Tel: 1-514-398-4031 - email: nancy.adler@mcgill.ca)

Montreal and the 2011 special issue of the *Academy of Management Review* is an invitation to beauty – an invitation to return our world to beauty.⁶

In yet another deeply rooted tradition, that of the Greeks, the word for calling (*kalein*) and the word for beauty (*kallos*) are related. What we are ultimately called to do is to make the world more beautiful.⁷ For many of us, that is so alien to our contemporary tradition of management practice and scholarship that it literally startles us.

Why such surprise? Because beauty has been almost completely absent from most discussions of leadership, and simultaneously condemned by most contemporary art critics and theorists.⁸ However, while beauty remains suspect, many of us are beginning to resist the urge to deny that beauty has a valid right, if not a need, to exist and to guide contemporary leadership theory and practice.⁹

What is beauty? What would leading beautifully look like? Do we even recognize it when we see it? Positive psychologists, along with those introducing positive approaches into our organizational vocabulary, have refocused scholarship on courage, wisdom, happiness and a wide array of other human virtues.¹⁰ Yet rarely do we engage with the power and profound influence of beauty. Given the decades of cultural neglect, can we still see the beauty that exists in the world? Can we see the beauty in our organizations and our lives? Are we still capable of yearning for a world that is beautiful – rather than a world that is merely less ugly?¹¹ How do we regain our ability and responsibility to co-create a more beautiful world? How do we reclaim our profoundly human role as creators and leaders?

The 2010 Academy Meetings, in urging the management community to “dare to care”, called upon us to return the world to beauty.¹² How delightfully subversive! *Organizational Aesthetics*, in focusing our attention on leadership artistry, is returning beauty, along with a whole array of aesthetic perspectives and processes, back into the center of our organizational and leadership conversations. We therefore invite you to reveal your profound appreciation for beauty and your equally profound compassion by daring to care, not just “out there in the wider world” but right here within our own profession. Using the vocabulary of contemporary artists:

Your canvas is the network of professional relationships that make up the worldwide community of managers, leaders, and management scholars;

Your artistry is your ability to see beauty, to hear beauty, to conceptualize beautiful leadership, and to act beautifully;

Your palette is how you use your own passion, compassion, and courage to recognize and to create beauty.

So when you read research findings that excite you, both in *Organizational Aesthetics* and more broadly, dare to care. When you meet new colleagues, dare to discover what they passionately care about. Dare to create beautiful moments right here in the middle of our profession, with your colleagues, students, and clients – even at the end of the day, when you are completely exhausted. Dare to show how passionately you care about our profession, its role in the world, and the contributions it is and could be making.¹³

Ask yourself: If I dared to care today, what would I do?¹⁴ What do I passionately care about? Who do I need to contact or talk with – or avoid altogether – in order to support my most passionate, compassionate scholarship and practice? The time you take to explore your own passion and compassion is your leadership landscape – paint it beautifully. What colors (Words. Actions. Silences.) can you use to make your experience as a management scholar, teacher, and professional more beautiful – for you, as well as for each person you encounter? Take the next few moments, before beginning to

encounter the ideas in this inaugural issue of *Organizational Aesthetics* to ponder how reading the articles could become most meaningful to you. What would it take for those ideas to ignite some of the most important contributions you will make in your career - if not in your life?

"The soul craves beauty.
Yet our world languishes in ugliness."¹⁵
It doesn't have to be that way.
Daring to care is the least we can do.
John O'Donohue – Nancy J. Adler

Artwork

The artwork opening this article is a monotype print 1/1 by Nancy Adler. Original image is sumi-e ink on natural-white, medium-weight, moderately textured Papier d'Arches: Image size: 22" x 14½" (Framed size: 30" x 21 ½"). First exhibited at Adler's "Reality in Translation. Going Beyond the Dehydrated Language of Management" exhibition held at Galerie MX, Montreal, Canada. © Adler, 2009. All rights reserved.

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Endnotes

¹ O'Donohue (2003, intro)

² The complete Ojibway Prayer from Elder Dr. Art Solomon, a member of the Anishinabe People of Canada, one of the aboriginal tribes living both in Canada and the United States, is:

*Grandfather,
Look at our brokenness.*

*We know that in all creation
Only the human family
Has strayed from the Sacred Way.*

*We know that we are the ones
Who are divided
And we are the ones
Who must come back together
To walk the Sacred Way.*

*Grandfather
Sacred One,
Teach us love, compassion, and honor
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other*

³ For a review of the field of managements, historic tradition of of incorporating social values in its research, see, among others, Walsh, Weber, and Margolis (2003).

⁴ *Tikkun olam* (Hebrew: תיקון עולם) is a Hebrew phrase meaning "repairing the world." In [Judaism](#), the concept of *tikkun olam* originated in the early rabbinic period. The concept was given new meanings in the [kabbalah](#) of the medieval period and further connotations in modern Judaism. ... The phrase *tikkun olam* is included in the [Aleinu](#), a Jewish [prayer](#) that is traditionally recited three times daily. The *Aleinu*, said to have been written by the Biblical Joshua.... For some Jews, the phrase *tikkun olam* means that Jews are not only responsible for creating a model society among themselves but also are responsible for the welfare of the society at large (Blidstein, 1997)." As cited in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tikkun_olam

⁵ As cited in Jacobson (1996: p. 7). Note that *Tiferet* in Hebrew is: תְּרַפֶּת.

⁶ An earlier version of this article was presented as a plenary address at the 2010 Academy of Management Meetings in Montreal.

⁷ See O'Donohue (2003:13)

⁸ Some notable exceptions to the absence of beauty in the discussion of management and leadership include, Adler (2002), Ladkin (2008), Taylor (2010; 2012), Merritt (2010), and Jean Paul Stephens doctoral work at the University of Michigan (2010). Also see Adler (2010a & b; 2006). According to James Hillman, as cited in O'Donohue (2003: 7), "The arts, whose task once was considered to be that of manifesting the beautiful, will discuss the idea only to dismiss it, regarding beauty only as the pretty, the simple, the pleasing, the mindless and the easy. Because beauty is conceived so naïvely, it appears as merely naïve, and can be tolerated only if complicated by discord, shock, violence, and harsh terrestrial realities. I therefore feel justified in speaking of the repression of beauty." Hillman (1998) argues, as cited by Ladkin (2008:32) that "'beauty' is one of the most repressed and taboo concepts in our secularised and materialistic times." For a critique of how beauty is viewed in the contemporary art world, see James Hillman and Suzi Gablik.

⁹ Based on prominent French artist Pierre-August Renoir's (1841-1919) question, "Why should beauty be suspect?" and paraphrased from American painter and draughtsman Ian Hornak's (1944-2002) statement recommitting himself to beauty, "While I know that the beautiful, the spiritual, and the sublime are today suspect, I have begun to stop resisting the constant urge to deny that beauty has a valid right to exist in contemporary art".

¹⁰ For a discussion of positive psychology, see Seligman (2003), and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). For a similar discussion of positive organization studies, see Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn (2003) and Cameron & Caza (2004), Dutton & Glynn (2008) and Dutton and Sonenshein (2009), among many others. On happiness, see the recent work of Ben-Shahar (2009, 2007, 2002).

¹¹ Architect and environmentalist William McDonough was the first to emphasize that "less bad" is not a substitute for good" in our aspirations for organizational and societal change. See McDonough (2001, 2002).

¹² An aspect of "daring to care" is compassion. For a discussion of recent management scholarship on compassion see, among others, Adler & Hansen (2012), Lilius et al. (2008), Dutton et al. (2007; 2006), Frost (1999), Frost et al (2006; 2000), Kanov et al. (2004).

¹³ See Adler & Harzing's (2009) challenge to return the scholarly management profession to its original purpose: to contribute to the broader society.

¹⁴ For a more in depth discussion of scholars' daring to care, including by using aesthetic approaches, see Adler & Hansen (2012).

¹⁵ O'Donohue (2003, intro)