

theglobalroundhouse

Jazz, Business, International Relations

April 20, 2012

Elephant Sperm Banks — Good Idea for Business & for Jazz

8 Comments

“Inbreeding presents real problems... [and it] isn’t just a problem for captive elephants” – it’s a problem for businesses and is an often-sited critique of jazz. Scott Anthony delves into his discussion of “[innovation inbreeding \(http://blogs.hbr.org/anthony/2012/03/stop_inbreeding_innovation.html\)](http://blogs.hbr.org/anthony/2012/03/stop_inbreeding_innovation.html)” by using the example of Jackson (<http://www.economist.com/node/21548994>), a Pittsburg area elephant who has sired so many calves in the US there is concern that the gene pool is homogenous and the species is at risk. Scientists want to create a sperm bank so as to diversify the gene pool in the creation of future calves. You see, whether in elephant sperm or in business, homogeneity (across sectors, within divisions, in the talent pool, etc.) is a bad thing. In business “inbreeding” occurs – when “innovation efforts are consistently led by the same group of people who have lived their life within the company.” In jazz, so the critique goes, “inbreeding” takes the form of musical stagnation and institutionalization.

Inbred businesses

Businesses seeking to retain or initiate their presence in established or emerging markets face a problem of integration. People stick to what’s familiar, it’s a [herding mentality \(http://pragcap.com/herd-mentality\)](http://pragcap.com/herd-mentality) that provides psychological comfort through homogeneity. Valerie Gauthier (<http://mitsloanexperts.com/2012/03/29/teaching-savoir-relier-or-relational-intelligence-a-leadership-approach-developed-by-valerie-gauthier/comment-page-1/#comment-884>) notes managers in today’s globally interconnected businesses “feel a constant tension between the need for agility... and the quest for purpose, direction, and meaning.” They flounder, sensing the need to do something different but are unsure about just what to do and how. Their angst, she notes, “leads to irrational and erratic behaviors.” Yet it is this very tension that encourages the innovation necessary for business success, especially in the midst of ever-changing conditions. Managers not accustomed to hybridity in the workplace “gene pool” develop symptoms of neurosis and are indicators of systemic damage or worse, financial extinction. They need cultural coping mechanisms.

Hybridity in business

In “[Learning How To Grow Globally \(http://sloanreview.mit.edu/the-magazine/2012-spring/53303/learning-how-to-grow-globally/\)](http://sloanreview.mit.edu/the-magazine/2012-spring/53303/learning-how-to-grow-globally/)” Christopher Bingham and Jason Davis use a “Soloing vs. Seeding” analogy to illuminate the differences between homogeneity and hybridity. Soloing and seeding

represent direct and indirect approaches to learning respectively. Businesses need both. The soloing arm tends to realize financial success faster; while seeding yields slower growth initially but performs better long-term. Blending these approaches to create a hybrid seed (see, we're back to elephant sperm) would seem to strengthen the company overall while also maximizing the talent pool. Moreover, a combination approach allows both a full-scale unified effort as well as a small group concentrated effort, a nimble arm to meet specific demands. In botany as with elephant sperm, the cross-pollination of ideas creates hybrid seeds that are resilient; they are better able to handle shifts in the (financial) environment such as wind gusts (wild market swings), tsunamis (depressions and recessions), and earthquakes. Growing globally will require adaptability to changing conditions.

Stagnant Jazz?

The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (http://jalc.org/concerts/c_orchestras09.html) and its institutional home come under regular attack for being unimaginative and restricted in their programming – homogenous. Eric Porter's, What is This Thing Called Jazz? (<http://www.amazon.com/What-This-Thing-Called-Jazz/dp/0520232968/>), offers a thorough overview of various critiques noting, the organization and its music “became a lightning rod for conflict, stemming from the attempt to craft a jazz cannon, from personnel decisions made regarding the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and from personality conflicts between major players at Lincoln Center and the jazz press.” As the Artistic Director of the JLCO Wynton Marsalis (<http://wyntonmarsalis.org/>) has often been condemned for “cultural gatekeeping” and espousing the “ideologies of social and cultural conservatism and neoliberalism”; and likewise, his music has been critiqued for being dated.

The charges are not without merit. You see, when cultural osmosis (like cellular osmosis) is thorough, the entity loses its apparent “two-ness” and becomes a singular new entity. So, as the ensemble performs in its characteristic swing style; tightly woven instrumental sections move convincingly through the score with locomotive power, difference gives way to the riveting dynamics, and the steady rhythm suggests automation. However, we must remember, the score is likely to have been arranged specifically for the performance; meaning, it is already a departure from the original. Also, solos are always current on the night they are performed; they are not written down and so cannot be repeated verbatim from night to night. Innovation is inherent within these conditions and the response to changing conditions is reflexive.

Change, Grow & Be Stronger...

Jackson's efforts notwithstanding, the scientists in Pittsburg, businesses and jazz musicians know – hybridity is a good thing. Enduring long-term means coalescing disparate parts and making a whole, new thing. Call it what you will – cultural osmosis, hybridity, integration, diversity – when we are made to move beyond our comfort zones, we adapt, change and grow.

Collective Improvisation

The clip I'm attaching to this post is an example of collective improvisation (listen closely for this beginning at 2:45s); everyone is playing a different take on the melody at the same time – sonic hybridity.

Posted by [theglobalroundhouse](#) in [Albert Murray](#), [Blues](#), [Business](#), [Jazz](#), [Wynton Marsalis](#)
Tagged: [albert murray](#), [blues](#), [christopher bingham](#), [collective improvisation](#), [elephants](#), [emerging markets](#), [Harvard Business Review](#), [improvisation](#), [JALC](#), [Jazz](#), [JLCO](#), [MIT Sloan Review](#), [science](#), [Scott Anthony](#), [Stomping the Blues](#), [The Economist](#)

8 thoughts on “Elephant Sperm Banks — Good Idea for Business & for Jazz”

1. [pozycjonowanie stron](#) says:

April 25, 2012 at 8:30 PM

A person basically help to make honestly articles I'd state. This is actually very first time I visited your website and thus far? I surprised with the research you made to create this particular publish amazing. Great job!

Reply

○ [theglobalroundhouse](#) says:

May 1, 2012 at 4:36 PM

Thank you for reading. Please keep checking in!

Reply

2. [healthy advice](#) says:

April 25, 2012 at 10:22 PM

Wow, wonderful blog layout! How long have you been blogging for? you make blogging look easy. The overall look of your website is magnificent, let alone the good content provided, related with “healthy advice” and all kind of valuable info, for different tastes and ages!... Thanks for

everything!..

Reply

- **theglobalroundhouse** *says*:

May 1, 2012 at 4:35 PM

How wonderful. Thank you. I'm a beginner at blogging but have been carrying around ideas for a while now. So glad to finally have a home for them!

Reply

3. **Cryoglobulinemia** *says*:

April 27, 2012 at 3:38 PM

I conceive this web site has got some really excellent information for everyone : D.

Reply

4. **Jamar Epstein** *says*:

May 8, 2012 at 10:28 PM

Definitely, what a fantastic blog and instructive posts, I will bookmark your site.All the Best!

Reply

5. **Jim Bogaert** *says*:

May 10, 2012 at 11:00 PM

Great post. I was checking continuously this blog and I am impressed! Very useful info specially the last part I care for such information much. I was looking for this particular info for a very long time. Thank you and best of luck.

Reply

- **theglobalroundhouse** *says*:

May 11, 2012 at 7:48 AM

Thanks for reading and for finding something useful in my content. Please share my site with your network!

Reply

[Blog at WordPress.com.](#) | Theme: [Splendio](#) by [DesignDisease](#).

Follow

Follow “theglobalroundhouse”

Powered by [WordPress.com](#)