

# THE DYNAMICS OF INCLUSION

BY MICHAEL GOLD



What does jazz have in common with the challenge faced by business in a global economy?

Simply put, the dynamics of inclusion.

Despite its enormous influence on the musical level, the real contribution of jazz has yet to be fully understood by society and culture. That contribution comes from the process of creating the music itself. The enduring contribution of jazz comes through an understanding of the social process that occurs within the ensemble every time a jazz performance happens.

At the end of the day, jazz is all about process. It's about how expert musicians are able to act autonomously by fusing leadership with support, listen beyond the realm of what they already understand, improvise by thinking "out of the box," and bring passion to their work. These are the very skills that the 21st century knowledge-worker needs to succeed. These skills are the very ones that today's executives exhort their workforce to exhibit so the business can excel in the global marketplace. Yet these skills are not taught, and are a struggle for many non-musicians.

The secret of jazz lies in a balance of dynamics that empowers the group, while at the same time showcasing the individual. How do you achieve this? Through the dynamics of APRIL – autonomy, passion, risk, innovation, and listening.

### **Autonomy**

Jazz soloists play alone. They are autonomous. But this autonomy, oddly enough, is based on inclusion. The constant rotation between leadership and support is what makes autonomy in jazz possible. Creative interdependence is at the core of collaboration and the jazz ensemble – and any business today depends on the realization of each member's full potential.

### **Passion**

In the jazz ensemble passion is the glue that holds everything together. Duke Ellington said it all with the words "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing." The passion of emotional commitment is at once the driver of the creative process, and the key to retaining good talent. Passion is a renewable resource that can be reignited by creating an environment that challenges people with new ideas, supporting and encouraging experimentation and continual learning.

### **Risk**

In an ideal business environment, managers are constantly taking risks and improvising. They are encouraged to leave the score and trust that their knowledge will allow them to respond to the day-to-day challenges they encounter. In jazz, unlike classical music, the product is not a fixed piece of music. The product is a "new idea process" – a process in which the goal is to surface new ideas and risk experimentation by blending individual expertise with group goals.

### **Innovation**

Innovation, like improvisation, is a process that requires managing uncertainty. Innovation in jazz and in business requires imagination to deal with the emergence of the unexpected. Combining logic and intuition in the quest for innovative response to change allows us to spontaneously draw on all we've gained from past experience – and to quickly resolve challenging situations.

### **Listening**

The ability to listen is central to improvisation in jazz. By listening we remain connected to process and we learn what is new. By suspending assumptions and listening beyond the comfort zone of what we already understand we discover the real nature of emerging change. For business in a world of constant change, the ability to listen is critical.

Jazz has survived for a century against incredible odds because of its ability to listen and respond proactively instead of reactively. Both audience and performer come away from a successful jazz performance feeling as though they have participated in the process that is inclusive, intuitive, and authentic. These are the values that business in the 21st century must provide and the dynamics of inclusion are a first step towards achieving that goal.

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**Michael Gold Ph.D.** spent many years as a jazz bassist in New York City. In addition to performing, he taught extensively and ran the jazz department at Vassar College. In 1995 he received a grant from The National Endowment for the Arts for a program that he designed to teach the skills of jazz improvisation to professional orchestral musicians.