



THE ART OF BUSINESS

By Wayne Visser

~ The art of business is, if anything, the art of being human ~

Business is, by its very nature, an adventure in creativity, an exercise in imagination, an enterprise in innovation.

If you think about it, commerce is all about creation – creation of markets, companies, products, brands and jobs – as well as finding inventive ways to target, design, position, package and sell these.

Even before 'entrepreneurship' entered the business lexicon, successful enterprise has always been the nexus where invention meets opportunity, innovation meets needs and resourcefulness meets markets.

So it is somewhat surprising to reflect on how little business has drawn on that paragon of creativity – the arts – to challenge, inspire, inform and project itself.

By contrast, the arts themselves have never shied away from using business as the inspiration for their creative endeavours.

So what happens when we open the Pandora's Box of artistic perspectives on business?

Can we piece together a mosaic of creative visions on commerce?

Or join up the dots of imagination on trade?

By using the arts – including painting, film, theatre, literature, cartoons and poetry – we get to see business's public persona reflected (including its shadow self).

We are able to illustrate, through the medium of the arts, how business is perceived in different parts of the world and at different times in history, including up to the present day.

So where might we start looking for images of business-in-the-looking-glass?

Would it be movies like Wall Street ("greed is good!") or The Corporation ("the pathological pursuit of profit and power")?

Or perhaps the poetry of former Fortune 500 executive James Autry (author of "Love & Profit") or the literary genius of Shakespeare ("all that glitters is not gold")?

Would we question why so many business leaders take inspiration from Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" or Machiavelli's "The Prince"?

And would we be amused or infuriated by the doctored logos of multinationals or spoof corporate websites that fall foul of anti-globalisation protesters?

Is there "many a truth in jest" to be found in the "fat-cat" businessman caricatures that go back centuries, or the cartoon vitriol of Enron's jailed executives?

Do these artistic commentaries give us a window into the soul of business, or simply a superficial view of its popular mask?

Whichever way you see it, these highly visual, evocative and stimulating illustrations all have something to say about the role of business in society, especially its contribution to (or violation of) the public good.

All the current debates around environmental responsibility in the face of climate change and ecological destruction, or trade justice in the context of persistent poverty for the majority of the world's population, are brought into sharp, colourful focus by the arts.

And the picture they conjure is not always negative.





The creativity of the arts has often been used in business to encourage innovation, motivation and responsibility, whether it is the use of industrial theatre for AIDS awareness in South Africa, or Haiku poetry in leadership workshops in the UK.

And after all, what can be more creative than the advertising industry itself?

The power of using the arts as a lens through which to view business is that we get an insight into the psyche of the modern corporation.

We tap into the mood of the public and their often unspoken fears and prejudices about business.

And we also begin to see business for what it really is – a deeply human enterprise, with all the foibles and potential which that implies.

Hence, the art of business is, if anything, the art of being human:

An eternal stage for playing out so many of our most familiar dilemmas –

The struggle between head and heart, between ambition and morality, ego and altruism, self-fulfilment and service to others.

And the art, as opposed to the science or economics, of business, is to find beauty, truth, and yes, even love, in the creative process that is enterprise.



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