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The Value of Arts for Business

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The Value of Arts for Business

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The Value of Arts for Business by Giovanni Schiuma (Cambridge University Press, 2011, 294 pages) is the most thorough book-length coverage of the use of arts for instrumental purposes in business. Schiuma is Scientific Director of the Centre for Value Management and Professor of Innovation Management at the Università della Basilicata, Italy. As far as I know, this is only the second book-length work intending to cover all aspects of how the arts can improve business practice. Lotte Darsø's *Artful Creation: Learning-Tales of Arts in Business* was much more practical in orientation, but is now eight years old. Developments in the field since then certainly merit a new review.

The background readers bring to this book will significantly affect the value it provides. If you're an academic, this should be a fascinating coverage of both theoretical and the practical aspects of a relatively new field bridging the arts and business. If you're a practitioner, applying the arts in business, this book will be somewhat frustrating because of the excess of "why" and with very little "how-to" and practical examples in the first 100 pages, but, overall, should give you new ideas for how to position what you can offer businesses, as well as increase your knowledge of business needs. If you're a businessperson, you're not likely to discover this book unless someone gives it to you or highly recommends it, and that's likely to be a practitioner since few business people will find a book on such a niche topic that's written first for an academic audience. And that's a shame.

I come to it as a writer or editor in the two distinct worlds of arts-based learning and business, and also as a part-time academic, teaching MBA students how the arts can affect creativity and leadership. Having been observing, writing, and teaching about this relationship for the past seven years, to me Schiuma's ideas are not new, although there are some new and exciting examples and his analysis has led to new frameworks, explained in numerous flow charts and matrices, for thinking about what he calls arts-based initiatives or ABIs, which some others would call arts-based interventions.

Of particular use, I think, is his Arts Value Matrix. His analysis of the work that has been done and how it relates to business needs has led to this nine-box matrix with the change in people on one axis and the change in the organization on the other. This can be helpful to both business and arts individuals as they consider precisely how a particular arts intervention can be useful.

Other frameworks have been proposed before, for example by Darsø and by Steve Taylor and Donna Ladkin. Schiuma's is more detailed, broken into finer segments. Since many in business seek precision and detail in their analysis, The Arts Value Matrix has the potential to be a good step forward, although for most working in the field the broader categories of Darsø or Taylor and Ladkin already provide effective ways to view and analyze such work. His added detail, though, may help arts practitioners think of new ways they might influence business activities.

Schiama goes to great lengths to show how correctly aligned, integrated, and executed ABIs will positively influence strategic and performance objectives in a business. He gives good direction as to how to set up, run, and then assess an ABI. The business purposes for the arts, as shown, for example, in his portrayal of the links between knowledge assets, organizational capabilities, and business performance; and his conceptual dimensions of the Arts Value Map, should only lead to better planning and evaluation of how the arts can affect business. Although beneficial for readers from arts backgrounds who have little business background, at the same time they may find the book slow going and be tempted to skim through many sections to get to the practical examples.

I believe the only example he cites more than once is Unilever's Catalyst, although he rarely uses the name Catalyst, which makes it seem like these may be different activities at a wide range of Unilever sites rather than a unified, well known program designed by Alastair Creamer, which ran for multiple years. It's curious that he chose not to unify these examples, since the apparent success of Catalyst is arguably the biggest success in this field to date.

Before I read a book that's in a field I know well, I often give it a preliminary judgment by a skim of the references. Does the author use most of the sources that I think are valuable, therefore showing grounding in what I believe is important? Does he offer many references that I don't know, giving me the likelihood of considerable new learning? Schiama succeeds on both counts.

As someone who leans to the practitioner side more than the academic, I'm pleased to see references to Darsø, Otto Scharmer's *Theory U*, Rob Austin & Lee Devin's *Artful Making*, and to articles from the two special issues on arts-based learning for business published by the *Journal of Business Strategy*. He also cites the academic article many would call the most influential in tying the arts to management, Nancy Adler's "The Arts and Leadership: Now That We Can Do Anything, What Will We Do?"

"Is there a canon of literature developing for the arts-business field?" Developing, yes. Developed, no. The past literature has emphasized examples of successful projects. Schiama adds many concepts from the business side and, I think equally importantly and less obviously, brings in the interdisciplinary literature. Arts-based learning benefits from the inclusion of relevant philosophy, psychology, and education literature, as well as from other fields. I was very pleased to see references to scholars who I think are especially valuable to arts and business but who don't often appear in management literature, such as Martha Nussbaum, Eliot Eisner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Susanne Langer, and Ellen Dissanayake. Often, though, Schiama only mentions them briefly.

Like others in our field, I've been frustrated by the lack of awareness and acceptance of arts-based learning or ABI by business. For example, with the success and publicity about Unilever's Catalyst program, why was Arts & Business in the UK never able to replicate it? What are the major roadblocks for business executives: Timidity in the face of the new? Fear of the unknown? Lack of definitive cause-and-effect measurement of effectiveness? Or simply lack of information about the successes? This book, simply by helping address those roadblocks, deserves attention.

What has Schiama contributed that is new? His business-oriented charts and matrices should help many people think through the purpose of an arts initiative. But I believe his biggest contribution is due to thoroughness more than to originality. Arts-based learning has the potential to significantly improve both specific business skills as well as such broader areas as empathy, change management, and communication; by approaching the blending of business and the arts from multiple perspectives, Schiama clearly demonstrates that this is a viable field of study that deserves more attention.

References

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About the Author

Ted Buswick is executive-in-residence for Leadership & the Arts in Clark University's Graduate School of Management and corporate historian for The Boston Consulting Group. He is co-editor of two special issues of the *Journal of Business Strategy* about arts-based learning for business (2005, 2010) and co-author of *What Poetry Brings to Business* (2010) and *Slate of Hand: Stone for Fine Art & Folk Art* (2007).