

How do Culture and Commerce meet and how do they work best together?

Tessa Marchington founder Music in Offices, the Investec International Music Festival and Showcase Consultants, considers how culture and commerce meet and the context needed to make meaningful exchange possible.

What do the worlds of working in culture and commerce share?

The commonalities between commerce and culture are far more numerous than people may think and this is a good starting point for looking at the shared practice and translation between these two worlds.

Successful **businesses** are built on good relationships, effective communication strategies and powerful messaging to their audience, generally their clients. This is the essence of every artist practitioner or cultural institution as well – whether you are a musician, poet, dancer or creative practitioner. As a musician, you are communicating your interpretation of the music with the audience; as an artist you are sharing your concept or idea through your chosen medium; as an institution it's the programming and quality of your artistic output that defines your success. If your audience as a creative practitioner is a business, then the same expectations and alignment of deliverables are present.

Successful **creative collaborations** require shared goals and working practices brought about by careful listening. Listening and hearing are two very different things though. Beethoven, as an example, went deaf and couldn't hear but he never lost his ability to listen. Establishing the importance of listening as an inherent ingredient in any collaboration between commerce and culture will set the dialogue in **harmony** with a balanced, collaborative tone.

Establishing the importance of **listening** as an inherent ingredient in any collaboration between commerce and culture will set the dialogue in the right key with a balanced, collaborative tone.

At [Music in Offices](#) there is a continual exchange of ideas and skills at play – sometimes overtly through the workshops but often at an subconscious level. One pupil recently shared this with us:

"I've learnt more about how to give constructive feedback through my saxophone lessons than I have through all the training I have been given as part of my job. I have taken that learning and found myself using it when I give feedback to the associates I manage and mentor."

PARTNER, LINKLATERS

A leadership workshop we delivered in Diversity Week for Citi Bank is a good example of this creative learning. We focused on how to be an effective 'inclusive leader'. Leadership skills were already inherent in this group, so we took a very creative approach and looked at it through the lens of music. This was led by a jazz musician/conductor, who, having done an MBA, and therefore bilingual, was able to deploy business messaging in every point creating a shared language that people could relate to. The success of the workshop was down to his commanding approach, and also how we listened to the client's needs in preparation.

"That absolutely summed up diversity for me. A completely different way of thinking and approaching problems that are often dealt with in the same corporate approach using an analogy that was easy to understand and meaningful."

CITI DELEGATE

Another factor that acts as a common language between commerce and culture is **data**. All too often there isn't enough data to describe what the artist is bringing. Anders Petterson, founder of [ArtTactic](#) says, "What determines the value of art? It is incredibly important to understand the different metrics and value drivers for each collecting segment, otherwise you are just entering a marketplace without knowing the rules, and would likely be taking unnecessary risks." For businesses, risk is always a red flag. Although individually you might be increasingly embracing 'risk' within your team, collectively, institutions are notoriously risk-averse. This creates tension between individual willingness and the institutional objectives which can be softened with measurable data.

We run surveys at Music in Offices to quantify the benefits as well as we can and build statistics which help position the business benefits of engaging with music activities in the workplace:

83% of our pupils' say they work more productively after having their music lessons

79% of our pupils say that having lessons make them more inclined to stay at their companies

98% of choir members saying singing in a choir has had a positive effect on their mental wellbeing

Bridging the Gap of semantics

Creating this shared language for communicating between commerce and culture is fundamental. Language, gestures and words can carry multiple meanings. Even the word 'Artist' denotes multiple meanings to different people. To some it's a painter, to others it's a poet, a musician, a dancer or a variety of creative professionals. In order to achieve an equal partnership, a shared understanding of the context is achieved by an open communication process. At [Showcase Consultants](#) we work as cultural experts for management consultants, where this is paramount. The communication of presentations shifts away from their usual templates, the emphasis on visual assets becomes more important, and communicating artistic ideas for cultural strategies need new formats to sit in.

Communicate the process

To come together as **equals** in a meeting between an artist and a person in business requires a leap of trust from both parties. The norm is for the business person to hold the power through their control of the budget and payments. Conversely, the perception of what an artist is and does is often misconceived, veiled by myth and stereotype. Recognising that many business people are innately creative is important for the artist to acknowledge before coming into a meeting – either in their unique processes of their work or alongside their work as a hobby. I've lost count of the number of times I have been so completely humbled by the musical talents of city pupils – some of whom are holding parallel careers as musicians, often hidden from colleagues.

Equally, an artist occupies a multitude of roles in order to make their career sustainable. These include developing partnerships, fundraising, marketing and project manager as well as creative director and artist. As well as breaking down what the meaning of the word 'artist' is, also value this variety of experience.

Boundaries and rules in any process are important, and often not actually present enough for artists – some may see these as limiting, but in order to affect a successful outcome in a collaboration with a multi-disciplinary group of people, these rules and structure need to be co-designed to create the environment necessary to have true freedom of thought. Conversely, seeming to allow too much freedom can be overwhelming for someone who is used to structure and therefore could easily have the opposite effect. Choosing words which help to give a focused framework and stimulate fresh ideas can give recipients the empowerment needed.

The Artistic process

Often when culture and commerce collide there are already defined objectives needing to be met. However, there needs to be an increasing recognition for the outcomes to be **open** allowing for new paradigms and a shift towards achieving the unexpected. This is an absolute for the artistic process to fully be allowed freedom, enabling true innovation and sincere artistic expression. In fact, by engaging with this approach, whether in a mentoring environment, or a team brainstorming session you are embarking on an artistic process. By naming this in a business context, you will see people take on a different approach; feeling empowered to think and act more freely. The communication of new ideas takes patience to express and understand, which in itself demands space and time to think and make interpretations. Both parties need to allow for this in their choice of language and the time allocated for meetings. When the brief is undefined in this way, with an Open Brief*, the intention is to critically question and prioritise long-term benefits over short-term goals for the betterment of society as a whole.

From residencies, sponsorship, placements and consulting there are a few links here to different ways that commerce and culture have met in interesting and impactful ways. The pioneering [Artists Placement Group](#), the placemaking projects of [Future City](#), the ongoing support of Investec for the [Investec International Music Festival](#), the British Land partnership with the [New Diorama Theatre](#) and when fashion meets business in [The Lab, E20](#).

Conclusion – To bring about effective, beneficial and sustainable outcomes for when the worlds of commerce and culture meet, communication is key. There needs to be transference of each other's intended meaning to bring about a clarity of understanding from both sides; a collective awareness of how to really listen; an acceptance of the need for trust in each other when it feels unfamiliar or risky; and a shift away from expected outcomes to allow for new paradigms. Whether this is in the context of consulting, residencies or sponsorship – for truly successful outcomes the needs and shared goals must be defined and clearly articulated. And this can only be realised through open, positive collaboration of equals.

* Taken from the APG Manifesto.