

## **Organizations as Works of Art**

Lawrence J. Lad

Butler University

### **About the Work:**

This poem was created as an exercise in an annual faculty advance to kick off the academic year. I invited faculty and staff to identify what comes to mind when they think about organizations as a form of art. Some of the examples come from that exercise.

### **About the Author:**

Larry Lad is a faculty member in the Lacy School of Business at Butler University where he teaches undergrad and graduate courses in Strategy and Leadership. Historically, his research focused on business government relations and industry self-regulation. More recently, he is exploring the "maker space" movement in arts and economic development. In addition to using experiential and arts-based facilitation as a consultant, Larry is a practicing visual artist and poet, and an active volunteer on hunger relief and food rescue.

## Organizations as Works of Art

In the turbulent disturbance of everyday news  
 Wondering what tweet will delete the joy of a good night's sleep  
 Or what media story of an organization's scandal will have us climb back under the covers  
 A value in taking pause  
 To notice the awe in organizations making a difference in people's lives.

**Goodwill Industries** providing a job  
**Second Helpings** rescuing food and training chefs  
**Patagonia** advocating for the environment and equipping those that feed their soul in the Outdoors  
**The Humane Society** looking out for animal welfare  
**Amnesty International** fighting for social justice anywhere in the world  
**A safe daycare** that teaches kids to sing  
**A refugee center** in Germany, the Netherlands or Spain that offers hope  
**A prosecutors' office** in Virginia going after a money launderer and tax evader  
**A university** in the Midwest that launches students as entrepreneurs and global citizens  
**Unique venues** – stadiums, malls, concert halls, airports and train stations  
**Newfields**, the art museum that plants a sensory garden of aromas and textures to provide an experience for the blind  
**A standardized pallet** that simplifies material handling  
**A shipping container** that enables large scale international trade – from boat to train to truck that when stacked look like a metal matrix at the port

It's time to see organizations as works of art  
 Mankind's greatest invention  
 Unconventional perspective intentionally taken on.

Experiencing art starts with observation – 3<sup>rd</sup> person  
 Eyes wide open, ears attuned  
 Being subsumed in a movie theater, chills down the spine,  
 Noticing something different in a painting in a museum  
 Listening to a symphony or music group in a unique venue  
 Smelling and tasting a meal in a 5-star restaurant or a busy diner  
 Observation, sensed deeply.

Yet, we know an arts perspective lives in the 1<sup>st</sup> person,  
 In the experience,  
 The doing,  
 The conscious act of being in awe,  
 Senses engaged, actually making something that moves people...

Consider, for example, for the record, for the money  
 A well-made product that has you go WOW  
 An app that helps you find Thai food in Amsterdam  
 A risk management service that makes a business or family whole after a flood or fire  
 A wealth management company that sets the stage for financial freedom in retirement years  
 An office tower that redefines a skyline for a city  
 Logistics and supply chain management as **choreography**  
 Product development as **design**  
 Packaging as a **fashion** statement  
 Corporate social responsibility as **advocacy**

Corporate headquarters as **sculpture**  
Conversations at the conference table as **theater**, an employee feedback session as **improv**  
A full-page ad in the New York Times about TRUTH, or the #metoomovement  
Annual reports as spin  
Elegance in a financial statement that tells a **story**  
The morning latte as a well wrapped gift  
Shopping as a **gallery tour**...  
Office space is a **studio**, a **theater**, a **stage** ...

Inquire  
What's our role as scholars, educators, executives, performers, and makers  
In the composing this **musical**,  
Drawing the **storyboard**  
Stepping out in the **dance**  
**Rapping** on "this moment, this once in a lifetime"  
Might organizations behave better when they see their work as artful expressions  
Rather than transactions,  
As problem solving  
Rather than aggravations,  
And as expressions of beauty and joy

Go out and be makers, channel your inner Picasso and Twyla Tharp, compose yourself,  
Conceive other makers, catalyze creative conversations, provoke those comfortable with the  
Status quo  
And play on...