

Using Comic Art to Illustrate Various and Nefarious Modern Business Practices

Steve Dunphy

Indiana University Northwest, Indiana, USA

Keywords

Art, tools, comic illustrations.

Abstract

This manuscript suggests that comic art or cartoons can be used for illustrating, depicting, skewering or even satirizing various practices associated with modern business. Arguments are presented for why cartooning is a useful tool for business, education and the arts. The steps for creating a meaningful cartoon are outlined and various examples given. The conclusion notes that artful cartooning might even be useful as a tool for explaining phenomenon encountered both within the confines of the business world and beyond.

1. Introduction

Herein is proposed the use of artful comics as a tool for illustrating, depicting, skewering or even satirizing various and sundry modern business practices. The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 presents arguments for constructing cartoons in business, education and the arts. Section 2 enumerates steps for creating a meaningful cartoon. Finally, section three provides various examples.

2. The use of cartoons in business.

In the special issue call for papers on the arts, the editors make several points which are supportive of the use of comic art. They write:

Nowadays organizations benefit from being agile, intuitive, imaginative, flexible to change, and innovative to meet the complexity and turbulence of the new business age. Employees need to engage, energize and inspire so that they can exercise their feelings in everyday working activities and operate as innovative and transformational agents.

(Schiuma & Carlucci, 2015)

The comic art that is proposed would operate in a manner that is innovative and transformational. Using Scott Adams' *Dilbert Principle* (1996) as a guide, it is apparent that Adams is a cartoonist who fulfills many of the Schiuma and Carlucci directives. Adams, through his characters Dilbert and friends, "exercises his feelings in everyday working activities" that almost all workers can understand. In fact, the book, *The Dilbert Principle*, contains chapters on such similar or peripheral topics as called for by the special issue editors as:

Change

Machiavellian methods

Employee strategies

How to tell if your company is doomed

Downsizing

Leadership.

As is typical in a cartoon, the "transformational agent" is more direct and focused. For example, the chapter on "downsizing" contains the following exchange. The chapter opens with "the boss" telling a knock-knock joke. He asks, "Knock-knock?"

The employee responds, "Who's there?"

The answer is, "Not you anymore" (Adams, 1994, p. 244).

The point is that cartoon construction may be especially useful when applied to various business practices as a way for employees to draw attention to these practices. The illustrations may

be somewhat satirical, but they also may be therapeutic. They may be satirical in that many workers like to joke about themselves, their supervisor, their colleagues and/or their employer. Of course such joking should be done diplomatically. They are therapeutic because the process itself of constructing the cartoon can be liberating. The psychotherapist Susan Buchalter explains how in her book, *A Practical Art Therapy* (2004).

Clients are encouraged to depict a story through a cartoon... Clients are given a forum to express their issues and concerns; creating a cartoon makes the client feel more relaxed and more willing to express ideas. Serious concerns often materialize in the artwork as a seemingly silly cartoon is explored.

(Buchalter, 2004, p. 74.)

These “serious concerns” can then be explored with the psychotherapist in the same manner that business cartoons may be shared with colleagues. Yes, they are mere illustrations but do they depict any important and underlying themes? Would some colleagues like to comment on these themes and can a further discussion lead to a constructive resolution of the issues on display? Perhaps a bulletin board can be used in the breakroom to allow posters to anonymously tack up the various comical illustrations of the company’s current strategies, policies and procedures and as a way to spark more serious consideration about the organization’s moves going forward. If these considerations can lead to meaningful discussions, then the comical illustrations will have served their purpose.

Lastly, cartoon construction can be educational. The author has used illustrations in the form of “wuzzle-picture-puzzles” to enable working adults to master various terms associated with a basic business and organizational behavior course. In one example, students used the Microsoft clipart library to insert an emperor in a cave. A young man walks by and claims, “That’s strange. It looks like the cave ate the emperor.” A small bird warns, “I wouldn’t go in there if I were you!” The illustration is designed to trigger a picture association with the word, “Caveat emptor” (Dunphy, 2016).

A similar illustration is made of a man jumping over a toll turnstile in order to avoid paying his fare. A police officer asks, Is the fare jumper too lazy to pay his fare? The picture association is designed to illustrate the French term, “laissez fare.”

Both of these examples are useful for mastering the textbook’s terminology. The instructor or corporate trainer can identify words such as ‘caveat emptor’ or ‘laissez fare’ which are regularly misused, misunderstood and misapplied and then have the students construct wuzzle-picture-puzzles of those terms. These puzzles can be shared with the class or used as study guides for each student. The author’s experience has been that the construction of these wuzzle-picture-puzzles significantly increases retention and understanding of the terms.

The comics are “artful” in that they incorporate “clip-art” from any of the Internet’s clipart libraries. The author suggests using royalty free clipart from such sites as “bing.com” which are available in MS-word by clicking “insert” then “online pictures” and combining the pictures with various callouts accessible by clicking “insert,” “shapes,” and then “callouts.” Many of the figures selected are artful in terms of their color, design and multidimensionality. Of course actual cartoonists who have the time and talent to draw their own cartoons are the true artists and many have been recognized as such (Spurgeon, 2016).

3. Creating meaningful cartoons.

Most cartoonists who write about how they engage in their craft suggest it starts with a meaningful idea (Larson, 1985; Simpson, 2007). This idea might include a play on words, a punchline, a message or a set of points the cartoonist wishes to illustrate. The next step involves sketching out a story on a “story board” or simply a piece of paper. How many panels will be used? Many publications limit the number of panels to four. Then the comic is laid out. Various panels are designed to capture certain scenes and specific snippets of dialogue. Since comics are sequential art, the cartoonist must think about sequencing the story in such a manner as to draw in his or her

readers. Finally, the comic is drawn and refined. With the improvements in desktop publishing, this may simply involve copying and pasting various pieces of clipart and callouts from the publishing software. Hopefully, the pictures and dialogue build to something that proves to be communicative and rich in meaning for both the reader and the cartoonist (Cheng, 2012).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, complex, funny and meaningful ideas can be communicated via cartooning. The opportunity for self-expression, satire and humor can easily evolve into something much more. In the hands of a skilled cartoonist, the artistic pictures combined with meaningful dialogue might be a catalyst for real change in corporate strategy, employee interpersonal relationships, or even interactions between race, ethnicities and nations.

Special issue editors Schiuma and Carlucci call for recognition of “The arts as sources of value creation for business” and “aim(s) to examine models, approaches, methods (and) tools . . . to explicate the role and relevance of the arts as a value driver in private and public organizations” (2015). This manuscript shows that comic illustrations or cartoons may be an overlooked tool which can fulfill their potential as a value driver. Their use may serve as an effective vehicle for driving important encapsulated messages to heretofore unreached constituencies. Examples 1, 2 and 3 follow. Who knows? When constructed properly and artfully, comic illustrations might even serve as calls for implementing improvements first in the workplace, then in society and eventually to the world beyond.

Figure 1: America gives us “the business.”

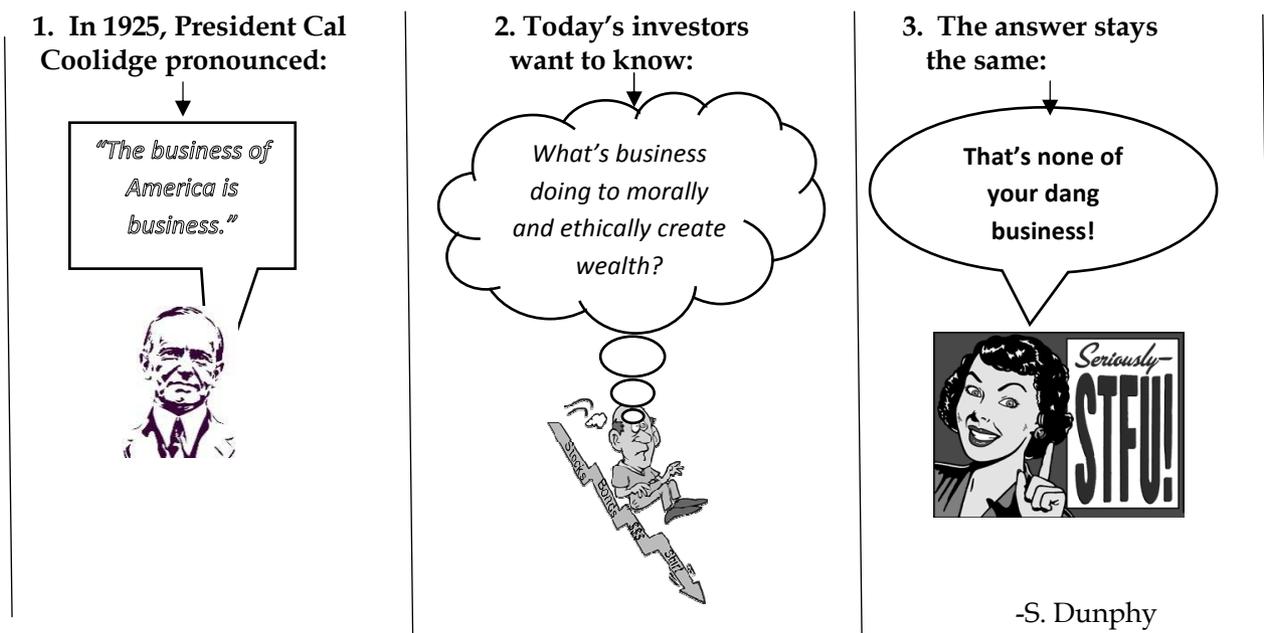
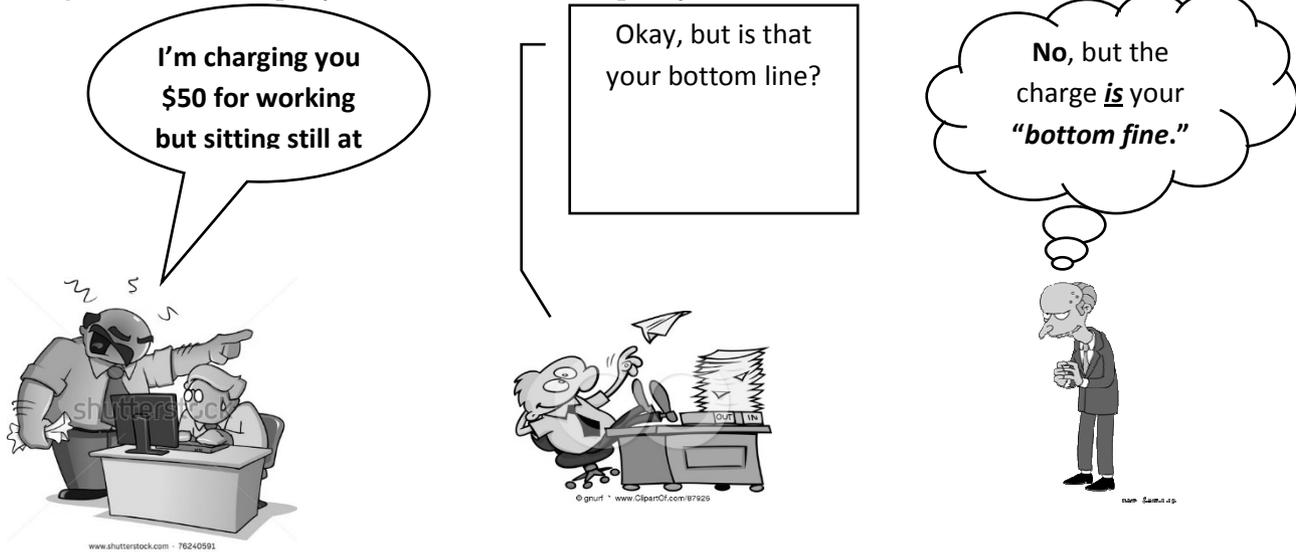
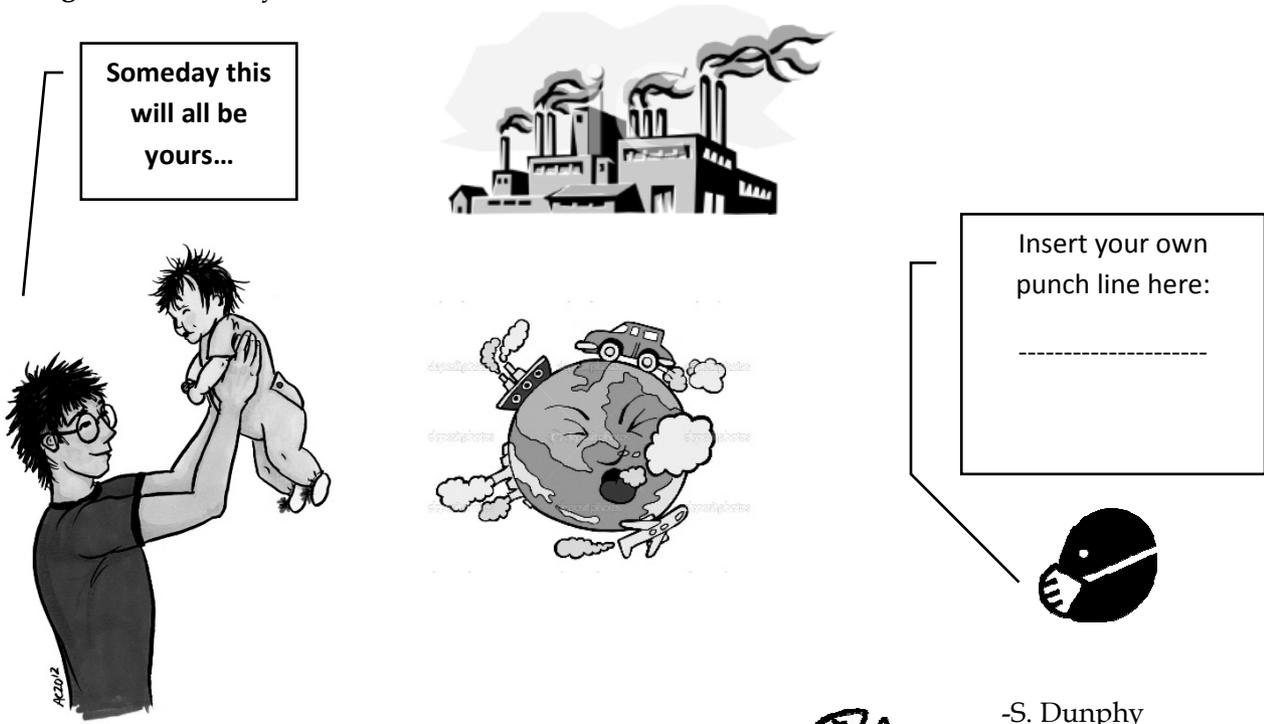


Figure 2: The Company announces a new HR policy.



-S. Dunphy

Figure 3: Someday...



-S. Dunphy

References

Adams, S. (1996), *The Dilbert Principle: A Cubicle's-eye View of Bosses, Meetings, Management Fads & Other Workplace Afflictions*, Harper Business, New York, New York.

Buchalter, S. (2004), *A Practical Art Therapy*, Jessica Kingsley, Publishers, Philadelphia, Pa.

Cheng, K. (2012), *See What I Mean? How to use Comics to Communicate Ideas*, Rosenfeld Media, Brooklyn, New York.

-
- Dunphy, S. (2016), "Using keywords to construct wuzzle-picture-puzzles for the purpose of mastering management & organisational behaviour terminology", *Behaviour & Information Technology*, V 35 No. 1, pp. 1-8 (Online).
- Larson, E. (1985), "Cartoonist Larson carries the macabre to hilarious lengths: Man and animals often trade places in 'Far Side' panels; does he go a bit too far"? *Wall Street Journal*, Eastern edition. 11 March, p. 1.
- Schiuma, G. & Carlucci, D. (2015), "Call for papers: Special issue on the arts as sources of value creation for business: Theory, research and practice", *The Journal of Business Research*.
- Simpson, M. (2007), For 'Snuffy Smith' artist, being a cartoonist was all he ever wanted to do, *McClatchy - Tribune Business News*, 14 June, p. 1.
- Spurgeon, T. & Dean, M. (2016), *Comics as Art: We Told You So*, Fantagraphics, Seattle, Washington.
-