THE IMPACT OF ART ON EMPLOYEES: IS IT A MATTER OF PRIDE?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to address questions related to the display of art in the work place. Specifically, the research explores the relationship between the presence of art in the workplace, its perceived importance, and the effect on employee motivation and service ability. The link to employees' pride in working for a company is explored. The research findings are based on quantitative data collected from seven Norwegian organizations, as well as five one-on-one in-depth interviews. The mean score for pride differs between companies that display art in the work space and companies that do not. However, the data showed no significant influence of art, design, and architecture on pride. The qualitative data suggest that the effects of art in the workplace may be subtle and difficult to measure.

KEYWORDS: Aesthetics and art, organizational culture, pride, employee motivation, service ability

INTRODUCTION

Organizations have long invested in art, sometimes as a statement of power, sometimes as a means of communicating a set of ideas about their values and beliefs, and sometimes as a means of transformation (Darsoe, 2004). Around 2000 major enterprises in Europe and North America, and more than half of Fortune 500 companies, collect art (Kottasz *et al.* , 1996). In Norway, for example, large international companies, such as Telenor (with an investment of NOK 100 m), Storebrand, Statoil, Hydro, Aker, and DNB, have invested in art and placed it in the physical working environment. Strati (1999) summarizes that organizational aesthetics focus on: (1) images related to organizational identity; (2) physical space of the organization; (3) physical artifacts; (4) organizational learning from artistic content and form; and (5) ideas, such as the beauty of social organizations. However, in spite of heightened corporate interest in aesthetics, little research has been done to determine its effect on employees (Bjerke *et al.*, 2007; Kottasz *et al.*, 2008; Warren, 2008). The objective of this research is to examine the impact of art on employee pride through a quantitative analysis of organizations that *do* and *do not* invest in art. The presence of art in an organization is theorized to contribute to an organizational culture that positively influences the importance of art in the physical environment, employee motivation, and service ability which, in turn, creates pride in the organization as a workplace.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, ART, AND THE ORGANIZATION

Sandelands and Buckner (1989) reinforce the point that art links the artist to the viewer. In a corporate context, Finn (1990) suggests that this linkage can benefit both the organization and the individual because art can represent a company's values and help to enrich the lives of employees and enhance their assessment of the organization. Kottasz *et al.* (2008) in their study of 181 organizations argue that a key role of corporate art is to stimulate employees' imaginations, develop a certain kind of ethos within a company, and transmit messages to employees about the organization's values. Managers reported that art has great potential to impact employee attitudes and behaviour. However, these studies do not seem to take into account that there cannot be a specific continuity between the intentions of the artist and the viewer (Bordieu, 1984). Indeed Lyotard (1984, p. 106) contends that the public and the "diffusers of cultural merchandise" define a work as avant garde "in direct proportion to the extent that it is stripped of meaning." Vattimo (1988) also points out that contemporary art (which according to Kottasz *et al.* (2008) is present in many corporate collections) is "constitutively ambiguous." Rather than positioning itself within a determinate set of values, art challenges those values and overcomes the limits they impose. This situation creates the difficulty that art collections cannot accurately reflect organizational values and lead sometimes to the ironic situation that corporate collections contain art works that were intended by the artist to be subversive, anti-capitalist, and anti-institutional.

Even if there can be no guarantee of alignment between the intended message of the artist and the buyer, Althusser (2008) supports the notion of connectivity between the creator and the consumer, and contends that the collector is an aesthetic producer through the choice and display of art works. Thus, art works may have the potential to influence employee attitudes and behaviour directly by enhancing well-being and indirectly by impacting organizational culture. Indeed, the work of Strati (1992, 1999) and Gagliardi (2006) suggests that art works can influence employees, as well as have a role in defining the nature of the organization to external stakeholders through both their functionality and symbolism. These two roles are connected.

An aesthetic experience can be encountered directly by external stakeholders who see the art first hand. Art may be experienced indirectly, if the aesthetics of the working environment impact employees and determines their way of behaving towards each other, customers, and other stakeholders. Indeed, these types of encounters indicate the link between aesthetics, described by Ranciere (2006, p. 13) as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience," and organizational culture, described by Schein (1985) as the first level of culture - the artifacts – including art. Thus, artifacts both reflect cultural assumptions within the organization (or, at least, an élite within the organization) and help to define the culture. This reflection and definition occurs because art acquisitions are an expression of the organizational members who choose them and reflect assumptions about a current cultural reality or a desired future (Bjerke *et al.*, 2007). Further, when aesthetic choices are made, they are read by others (who may or may not interpret the symbolism as intended) and help to define for managers and employees a sense of the organization.

Schein (1985) views artifacts (including art, design, and architecture) as an expression of the more deeply rooted basic assumptions in an organizational culture. Consequently, art works reflect either the current or desired culture and, in turn, are designed to influence the attitudes and behaviour of employees (Bjerke *et al.*, 2007). Cooper *et al.* (2001) note that organizational culture contributes to the creation of a common perception of how organizational members should behave, together with a sense of involvement with, and commitment to, organizational values and norms. Schneider (1990) also argues for the impact of culture on employees, such that it can contribute to a high level of morale, and a sense of belonging and identification with the mission and values. Fey and Denison (2003) argue that theory on organizational culture (involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission) and its impact on organizational effectiveness applies to all cultures, although they recognize there may be differences in the understanding of concepts. Further, Parker *et al.* (2003) link belonging, motivation, and satisfaction to organizational performance.

Organizational culture clarifies expected behaviour and stimulates desired performance - something that can have an impact on organizational productivity. According to Van der Post *et al.* (1997) and Cooper *et al.* (2001), the organizational culture's potential has a significant impact on organizational performance. Maister (2001) argues that financial performance can be directly attributed to good client relationships based on a high quality of service. Gillespie *et al.* (2008) also link organizational culture to customer satisfaction. Paulin *et al.* (2006) found that organizational commitment influences both overall citizenship behaviours and customer-linked behaviours. Thus,

organizational culture and work climate are important when it comes to enhancing employees' work place experience and performance (Sadri and Lees, 2001) and delivering good service to customers (de Chernatony 2001).

With respect to art specifically, there is a belief that art can affect people emotionally. Brain researchers, Kawabata and Zeki (2004), showed that the parts of the brain responsible for emotional responses were altered while the viewer was looking at a painting. Belova (2006, p. 101) also argues that images are not only made sense of intellectually, but also through our "whole embodied being, with all senses that come together to form a presence to things, without separating the rational from the perceptual and the visual from other sensations." Nancy (2007) points out the importance of understanding "sense" and the process of the sensory, and notes that "sense" is a word with double meaning: It identifies the process by which we sense something through our faculties and it is also how we make sense of what we sense (perceive). However, before we accept the primacy of the senses, we should note that much of contemporary art in corporate collections is focused more on stimulating the intellect rather than the senses.

The view of the value of art as intellectual and provocative derives from artist Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp's ready-mades, such as 'Fountain', 1917 (a urinal placed on its back and signed by Duchamp with the name R Mutt), were chosen on the basis of visual indifference. The challenge that Duchamp created, which still pervades much contemporary art, is that the idea of the work requires elucidation. The value of challenging art is that it has the potential to shake the audience out of their everyday experiences by creating an opening that can stimulate reflection, reappraisal, and re-evaluation. However, this process requires the individual to be active and attentive (Nancy, 2007) which may not be the case if the organization fails to stimulate interest in its art collection and if people ignore or become habituated to the works. As Barry and Meisiek (2010, p. 1513) note, "many employees stop noticing and forget that the art is even around... [C]orporate art is more likely to provide decoration, unless more active measures are taken to "put it to work."

Pride. In *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-1740), Hume describes pride as good, a pleasurable sensation, and necessary for human endeavor. "The object or cause of this pleasure is, by supposition, related to self, or the object of pride" (Hume, in 1969, p. 357). Pride may be seen as an intellectual emotion (Averill, 1991) and is most often regarded as a positive emotion (Lawler, 1992). Pride can also be viewed as a response to an evaluation of one's competence and achievement (Harter, 1985; Lewis, 2000). Pride is linked to activating self-representation and constitutes success and achievement (Tracy and Robins, 2007). Further, a consequence of identifying with "the other" is pride in another person's achievements (Rosenblatt, 1988). Thus, pride itself is associated with identification with, and internalization of, a given entity. Internalization suggests not only identification, but the incorporation into selfhood of the values and attitudes of an entity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The three research questions are:
RQ1: *Is employee pride related to the physical environment of the workspace, service ability, and employee motivation?*

RQ2: *Does art in the workspace have an impact on the perceived importance of art in the physical environment, service ability, employee motivation, and employee pride?*

RQ3: *Does the perceived importance of art in the physical environment, service ability, and employee motivation lead to employee pride?*

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative investigation of employees in seven Norwegian organizations was conducted. To strengthen the validity of the questionnaire, three terms were clarified in the introduction: (1) *art:* Paintings, sculptures, and other kinds of aesthetic decoration, (2) *design:* Interior design, colour used in the workspace, curtains, carpets, lighting, etc., and (3) *architecture:* Structure/shape of buildings, windows, office space and layout, ceilings, etc.. To contextualize the findings, five one-to-one in-depth interviews were conducted with corporate art buyers and curators to ask about the main motivations for purchasing art and placing it in the workspace.

Development of measures. Data for this research is drawn from a larger study. Based on literature reviews (in particular: Barry and Meisiek, 2010; Bjerke *et al.*, 2007; Cooper *et al.* 2001; de Chernatony, 2001; Finn, 1990; Gillespie *et al.*, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2003; Paulin *et al.*, 2006; Schein, 1985; and Van der Post *et al.*,1997) and in line with the procedure suggested by Churchill (1979) and the one employed by Kottasz *et al.* (2008) in the study of the connection between corporate art and corporate identity, 66 items were generated as follows: notions of values, norms, assumptions and vision (organizational culture) (11 items); perceptions of art and physical environment (5 items); job satisfaction (9 items); belonging (7 items); creativity and solution orientation (8 items); mood (8 items); motivation (10 items); and perception of own ability to provide customer service (8 items). A five-point Likert scale - "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"- was used. "I am proud of being part of this company" was used to measure pride. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were also collected.

Sampling. Non-probability selection and convenience sampling were used to identify employees that had contact with customers due to their importance in communicating organizational core values and objectives (de Chernatony 2001; Ind 2003; Wilson 2001). Employees from three Norwegian companies that invest in, and display, art in the workspace and four that do not invest in, and display, art in the workspace were included. Companies that invest in art included Norwegian companies Telenor, Storebrand, and Havforskningsinstituttet; companies that do not invest in art included Subsea 7, Cirriculum, Bergen og Omegn Boligbyggelag, and Rieber & Søn.

The sample size was 222 employees divided into two groups; 119 respondents worked in companies which had invested in art and had placed the art pieces in the working environment (Group A), while 103 respondents worked in companies which had not purchased nor placed art in the workspace (Group NA). In both categories, the majority of the respondents had worked in their respective companies between 1 and 10 years. However, there was more recent employment in Group NA (1-2 years) than in Group A (36.9% versus 18.5%, respectively), and more people with longer employment in Group A than in Group NA (25.2% versus 8.7%, respectively). The distribution of men and women was also dissimilar with 42% males and 58% females in Group A versus 71.8% males and 28.2% females in Group NA. The majority in both employee categories was between 30 and 60 years old. More than 70% of the employees worked in customer service, sales, or marketing.

RESULTS

Confirmatory factor analysis with Maximum Likelihood extraction and Varimax rotation was employed to develop aggregated factors for the independent t-tests and regression analysis. A set of 28 (of the 66) items which comprised three factor structures of interest to this study were identified: perceived importance of art in the physical environment, employee motivation, and service ability. (Please see Table 1.) As noted in their study of the impact of art, design and architecture on Telenor employees, Bjerke *et al.* (2007) found that employees do not see art as a separate entity, which is in accordance with Barry and Meisiek (2010) who suggest that art in the workspace may not be noticed by employees.

TABLE 1. FACTOR SOLUTION FOR ALL EMPLOYEES (N=222)

Importance of art in physical environment		Employee Motivation		Service Ability	
Art at work may influence the mood of the employees	**.829**	I get motivated by my assignments	**.846**	I provide good service to our customers	**.701**
The architecture at work may influence the mood of the employees	.802	I am satisfied with my job	**.806**	I enjoy being with my colleagues	**.674**
Art at work may be important for employees´ motivation	**.802**	I feel motivated at work	**.779**	I would describe myself as a creative person	**.624**
Art in the work space may inspire me	**.779**	My work assignments inspire me so I get in good mood	**.751**	This company emphasizes customer satisfaction	**.530**
The design at work may influence the mood of the employees	**.713**	Job satisfaction motivates me	**.648**	Employees contribute to make this company successful	**.490**
Design at work is not important when it comes to motivation	**.713**	I feel that my work is appreciated	**.628**		
Art is important to me	**.705**	Usually, I am in good mood when I come to work	**.448**		
The architecture at work may be important for employees´ motivation	**.702**	I have become more creative after having started in this company	**.406**		
I don´t think design at work has an impact on job satisfaction	**.698**				
The physical environment at work is important for my creativity/solution orientation	**.695**				
The design at work may inspire me	**.693**				
I believe that architecture has an influence on employees´ job satisfaction	**.688**				
Design is important in the work space	.674				
The total experience of art, design, and architecture may have an influence on my job satisfaction	**.658**				
I believe that art in the work space may have an influence on employees´ belonging	**.534**				

* Maximum likelihood extraction with Varimax rotation. ** Eigenvalues for all factors are above 1.

RQ1: *Is employee pride related to the physical environment of the workspace, service ability, and employee motivation?*

As shown in Table 2, pride in working for the company is correlated positively with art in the physical environment ($r = .174$; $p = .02$), and correlated positively, and much more strongly, with employee motivation ($r = .440$; $p = .00$) and especially service ability ($r = .598$; $p = .00$). Both employee motivation and service ability are correlated with art in the physical environment, and employee motivation is correlated rather strongly with service ability. Yet, as shown in the factor analysis reported in Table 1, these are all distinct factors.

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variables	"I am proud of being part of this company"	Importance of art in physical environment	Employee Motivation	Service Ability
"I am proud of being part of this company" (n=222)	1			
Importance of art in physical environment (n = 178)	**.174***; p = 020	1		
Employee Motivation (n = 208; 171; 208)	**.598****; p = 000	**.272****; p = 000	1	
Service Ability (n = 214; 175; 204; 214)	**.440****; p = 000	**.282****; p = 000	**.399****; p = 000	1

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

RQ2: *Does art in the workspace have an impact on the perceived importance of art in the physical environment, service ability, employee motivation, and employee pride?*

As shown in Table 3, for both employees in companies that invest in art (A) and do not invest in art (NA), the mean scores for perceived importance of art in the physical environment, employee motivation, service ability, and employee pride in their companies are high on average (out of 5.00), especially for service ability and pride in their companies. Interestingly, there is greater variance in the responses of employees who work for companies that invest in art (A). The acquisition of art does not seem to enhance employee motivation. Indeed, t-tests revealed that employees in companies that did not invest in art (NA) were significantly more motivated (t = -4.00; p = .00) and had more pride in their companies (t = -2.14; p = .03) than employees in companies that did invest in art (A). There is no significant difference with regard to employees´ self-perception of their service ability.

A regression analysis was conducted to determine what best explained pride in being part of companies for all employees regardless of whether their companies invested in art or not. As shown in Table 4, pride was explained significantly and positively by employee motivation and service ability (R^2 = .44). The beta weights for employee motivation and service ability were .54 and .21, respectively, indicating a very strong and moderately strong link, respectively, to pride in working for their company.

TABLE 3. PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF ART IN THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT, EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION, SERVICE ABILITY, AND EMPLOYEE PRIDE IN COMPANIES THAT INVESTED IN ART (A) AND DID NOT INVEST IN ART (NA)

Factors	n		Mean/Std. Dev.		Mean Difference	t-value	Sig. Level*(p)
	Art (A)	Not art (NA)	Art (A)	Not art (NA)			
Importance of art in physical environment	93	85	3.56/.84	3.42/.76	.14	1.15	.25
Employee Motivation	110	98	3.70/.80	4.07/.51	-.37	**-4.00**	**.00**
Service Ability	114	100	4.45/.60	4.46/.50	-.01	-.18	.86
I am proud of being a part of this company	119	103	4.20/.97	4.45/.76	-.25	**-2.14**	.03

*p≤0.05. Levene´s test for equality of variances was significant (p=.00) for Employee Motivation.

TABLE 4. DETERMINANTS OF PRIDE IN BEING PART OF THE COMPANY FOR ALL EMPLOYEES

Dependent Variable: "I am proud of being a part of this company"		
	All employees in companies that invested in art (A) and did not invest in art (NA)	
Independent Variables	***Beta weight***	***Sig. level***
Importance of art in physical environment	.03	.72
Employee Motivation	.54	**.00**
Service Ability	.21	**.00**
	R^2 = .44 *F* = 17.6; p = .00	

RQ3: *Does the perceived importance of art in the physical environment, service ability, and employee motivation lead to employee pride?*

A regression analysis was conducted to determine what best explained pride in being part of companies that invested in art (A) compared to companies that did not invest in art (NA). As shown in Table 5, pride was explained significantly and positively by employee motivation whether their companies invested in art (A) or not (NA) (R^2 = .49 and R^2 = .33, respectively). The beta weights for employee motivation and service ability were .51 and .47, respectively. Interestingly, service ability was also a statistically significant determinant of pride for employees who worked for companies that did not invest in art (NA), but not for those employed by companies that did invest in art (A), with beta weights of .27 and .13, respectively.

TABLE 5. DETERMINANTS OF PRIDE IN BEING PART OF A COMPANY THAT INVESTED IN ART (A) AND DID NOT INVEST IN ART (NA)

Dependent Variable: ´I am proud of being a part of this company´				
	Employees in companies displaying art (A)		**Employees in companies *not* displaying art (NA)**	
Independent Variables	***Beta weight***	***Sig. level***	***Beta weight***	***Sig. level***
Importance of art in physical environment	.10	.30	-.02	.83
Employee Motivation	.51	**.00**	.47	**.00**
Service Ability	.13	.25	.27	**.04**
	R^2 = .49 *F* = 11.34; p = .00		R^2 = .33 *F* = 6.08; p = .00	

FURTHER DISCUSSION

The five in-depth interviews revealed that investing in art and placing it in the physical working environment were based on three basic reasons: (1) executives' interest in art; (2) financial investment motives; (3) corporate statements and external branding motives; (4) corporate identity and pride motives strengthening corporate culture motives; and (5) strengthening employee creativity and job satisfaction motives. As an example of "corporate identity and pride motives," one of the in-depth interviews revealed that in the main office of Nordic Choice Hotels & Resort in Oslo (where there are 130 employees), about NOK 8 m (1.4 m USD) has been invested in art and placed in the workspace. Strengthening pride and corporate identity are the motives behind the art collection. The hotel chain is very conscious about the importance of the story behind each art piece so that the meaning of the art can be communicated and linked to the company's values. Each art piece has its unique short story written on it or next to it to inform employees about the painter and the uniqueness of the art piece. In addition, a well-known Norwegian curator (former curator of the National Gallery) is hired to tell the stories of the various art pieces to the employees. Some art pieces are rented from well-known contemporary artists to enable the content of the collection to be varied over time.

In contrast to the intentions of corporate art buyers and curators in big international companies, and contrary to existing literature on aesthetics and organizations, the analysis of the quantitative data from seven Norwegian companies suggests that art collections in work spaces are seen as part of the physical environment. It is doubtful whether investment in art does anything remarkable to employees´ motivation or service ability because employees in companies with no art are at a higher or equal level in those respects compared to employees in companies that do invest in art.

The findings beg the question: "Are art and the physical environment merely hygiene factors? Jon Fredrik Baksaas, CEO of Telenor, stated that, "Art, design and architecture are important forms of expression and sources of inspiration in the modern world. For Telenor, a huge international Norwegian telecommunications company, art is a visible manifestation of our basic values, promoting our ambitions of vitality and innovation." Such statements represents a "management assumption" according to Schein´s (1985) theorizing of organizational culture. There could be connections between art in the work place and other design and architectural elements and employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour. However, this research shows that art, design and architecture in the physical environment is perceived as a whole and one dimension among all employees, and for employees in companies which have invested in art. But this is not the case in companies which have not invested in art, which may be explained by employees´ perceiving the workspace as a hygiene factor similar to Herzberg´s (1974) definition of "working conditions" as an hygiene, not a motivational, factor.
As exemplified in the Nordic Choice Hotels & Resort case, employee motivation may create pride in companies which invest in, and display, art through storytelling around art and the physical environment. Perhaps, the more stories employees hear about corporate art and the physical environment, the more meaningful and motivational art becomes. Still, employees seem not to notice the artwork as a separate entity or dimension from the physical environment, which is line with Barry and Miesiek (2010). Furthermore, it should be stressed that respondents working in companies not investing in art score significantly higher on employee motivation than those that work in art-owning organizations, perhaps because more attention is paid directly to interventions that have a direct effect on employee motivation rather than on art works, which may be ignored or become divorced from a context that gives them meaning (Wu, 2002). While managers that instigate and support art-collecting practices may have intentions to express corporate vision and values or stimulate new employee behaviours, the reality might be that art ends up as decoration that strengthens the perception of the physical environment totality, and which becomes important if it is told so and if such companies attract aesthetically aware employees. This emphasis links to the findings of Bjerke *et al.* (2007) about the corporate art collection at Telenor. Because the art at Telenor that has the most impact is integrated into the architecture of the offices (Daniel Buren's pillars, Jenny Holzer's moving type installation and Maria Miesenberger's giant aluminium sculpture) and cannot be moved, employees have a problem seeing art separately from the totality of the physical environment at work. To get noticed the art either needs to be provocative (Barry and Meisiek, 2010) and/or promoted internally, which a company like Nordic Choice is practising by educating and involving its employees through story telling, a practice is in line with recommendations by Bjerke *et al.* (2007).

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study suggest that incorporation of art into the work environment is seen as part of the experience of the work place. There is also evidence to support the view that art acquisition and display has an impact on employees. Employees may territorialize "marked space" to some extent through storytelling and arts education. But in companies where art in the physical environment is not a big issue or is not focused on, there are other factors vital to increased service ability. Warren and Rehn´s (2006, p. 84) point that "consumption of art and art objects in an organizational setting shape our behaviours through subtle and interpretive matrices" is supported moderately by the empirical data. The five in-depth interviews suggest that investment in art is grounded in different motives. Companies seem to believe art collections placed in the workspace will have a positive impact on elements in the organizational culture and on employees' motivation and performance.

The findings have implications for researchers and managers. Investment in art, design, and architecture are justified from different perspectives. Schein's argument (1985) is that artifacts and creations (including art) can be linked to values and basic assumptions. He argues that the management of the design of the physical space is one way that leaders can embed a culture. However, Schein (1985) regards the management of the physical space as a secondary mechanism that is only effective if it is consistent with the primary mechanisms, which are

much more focused on fundamental beliefs and behaviour. If they are not consistent, they are likely to be ignored. Schein (1985, p. 240) also argues that the physical environment can potentially reinforce a leader's message, but that it needs to be explicitly managed, so that it reinforces other statements and actions. The implication here is that there needs to be an alignment between organizational strategy, actions of leaders, and the physical environment (including the use of art and design).

This research suggests that companies that invest in art, design, and architecture do not accrue benefits in terms of employees' view of themselves as service providers, which may be a case of a failure of alignment and/or indicate relative failures at the level of primary mechanisms. If such primary mechanisms are not supported by management behaviour then the intended effect of art, design, and architecture on employees will not by itself deliver on its goal. It may be, for example, that employee pride needs first to be created through storytelling and art education. Perhaps storytelling creates pride through identification (Rosenblatt, 1988) and internalization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

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