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ARGUING FOR DESIGN THINKING INTERVENTIONS AS A FORM OF ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on data from two projects where artists used their artistic competence as organizational change facilitators, we argue for a theoretical coupling of the discourse(s) of design thinking to research streams within art-and-management. The artistic dimension of design, the practice perspective and the artistic process should be considered if we are to understand the full potential of design thinking for companies.

This paper describes two artistic intervention projects that highlight valuable ways artists can contribute to organizational innovation and change. We begin with the theoretical frame of reference and a short methodological statement, followed by the empirical material. In the analysis section we point to ways in which such interventions are similar to ones led by designers when we consider the designer's process as individualized and contextualized. Finally, we draw conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

Our theoretical framework is multidisciplinary in that our area of interest intersects design, art, and management/organization theory. Here we present relevant academic areas, shown schematically in Figure 1.

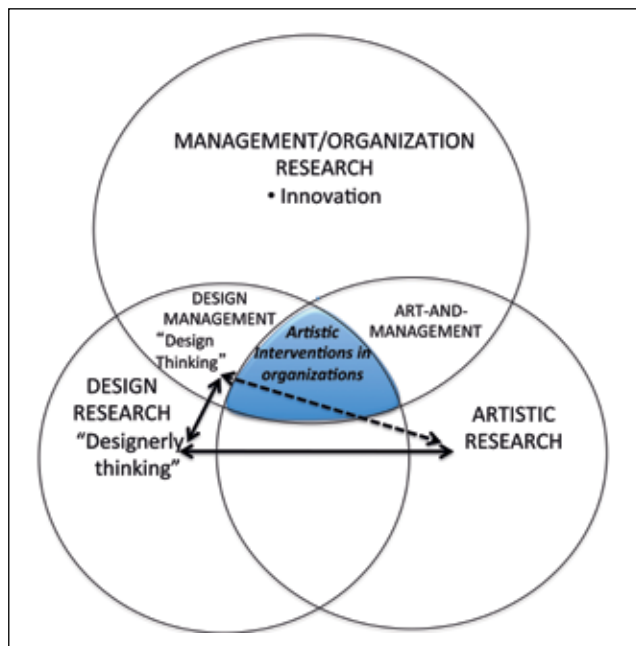


Figure 1. Theoretical Frame of Reference

DESIGN AND DESIGN THINKING

Design can be understood in different ways: as deliberate human creation to change reality into a preferred one (Simon 1996); as a reflective profession (Schön 1983); as the resulting artifacts, a design history perspective (Forty 1992); as an open process that is individual for every designer, yet with common characteristics (Cross 2011, Lawson 2006), or as the creation and re-creation of meaning (Jahnke, 2013 Krippendorff 1998, 2006, Verganti 2006, 2008). These academic discourse streams have different epistemologies and lead to different approaches to understanding design thinking (Johansson-Sköldberg et al 2013).

In this paper we consider design and designers' work as meaning-making, a perspective that draws attention away from the artifact as such, and directs it to the emotional relation – or sense-making – that occurs between the human being and objects of different kinds. The designer may still design artifacts, but the meanings other human beings bring to these artifacts are a vital part of the design process. Considering the designer as a meaning creator leads to regarding him or her from a hermeneutic perspective where meaning and interpretation are at the core (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). However, design is not only a matter of interpretation of something existing, but also active creating, a profession conducted in a workshop rather than taught only through books or lectures. It is a competence or knowledge-in-action (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1980) rather than cognitive knowledge, and is therefore best understood through a practice perspective (Bourdieu 1977).

DESIGN MANAGEMENT AND MANAGEMENT BASED DESIGN THINKING

Design management relates to activities concerned with managing the design process within a company. At first practicing designers used traditional management concepts when trying to explain “design”, but when the CEO of the world's largest design company, IDEO, introduced “design thinking” as “shorthand” for what designers do (Brown 2008, 2009), the concept and corresponding practices were embraced by managers, allowing designers to present their own vocabularies and ways of working. Early cases of companies using a design thinking perspective (Rae 2008), and successes at the operational level (Martin 2011) were accompanied by toolkits (e.g., Leidtka & Ogilvie 2011).

Like the discourse of designerly thinking, management-related design thinking has a number of different origins and expressions depending on the audience (Johansson-Sköldberg et al 2013). Along with others (e.g., Kimbell

2011, Rylander 2009), we are concerned about the lack of scholarly attention to the management-related design thinking discourse, and the need to remedy this if design thinking is to develop its theoretical grounding and practical application.

ART AND ART-AND-MANAGEMENT

Various forms of art, from visual arts and architecture to performing arts and literature, may be created for different purposes, ranging from communication to an expression of the imagination to entertainment or healing. In fine art there is no purpose except engagement in an aesthetic experience (Dewey 1934). Like design, art as produced by artists is a practiced discipline (McDonnell 2011), with clear research streams related to the various forms. Common to all artists, regardless of their specific technical expertise, is an *artistic process* involving the four discrete aspects of discovering the subject, sensing an audience, searching for specifics, and creating a design (Apps 2007).

We recognize, and take as our position in this paper, similarities and differences between the artistic process and design thinking. Similarities exist in the processes used for identifying and getting to the bottom of a problem though searching out new or alternative ways of dealing with its components. Differences are based in the more scientific or analytical logic of design while the artistic process is more intuitive and emotional.

Art-and-management, unlike design management, originated within academia, with theorizing related to organization theory. The discourse has developed along themes of recognizing emotions and senses as part of organizational life (e.g., Guillet de Monthoux 2004, Strati 1999, Hatch 1999), making metaphorical connections to artistic practice (Vail 1989), and forming links with leadership (Steed 2005) and entrepreneurship (Daum 2005).

Within the art-and-management literature there are many suggestions and case examples of *arts-based learning in business*, when leadership or organizational development practitioners use artist's tools for individual or organizational learning, development or organizational change (Nissley 2010), or in management education (e.g., Nissley 2002). Quite separate are considerations of arts in business, the exhibition or performance of artistic work in corporate or workplace settings for display or enlightenment, or the *business of art* as the funding, locating, and managing displays or performances of arts for pleasure, entertainment, or economic gain.

Artist in residence programs include a wide range of

opportunities where artists and other creative people take time away from their usual environment for reflection, research, presentation or production, or interactions with others, enabling cultural exchange and mutual growth (e.g., Harris 1999). Closely related are *artistic interventions*, defined by Berthoin-Antal (2009:4) as

a wide range of short- and long term forms of bringing people, processes, and products from the world of the arts into organizations. ... to intervene means to come between, to involve someone or something in a situation so as to alter or hinder an action or development. Intermediary organizations, artists, and host organizations define the nature of the interaction, e.g., collaborative, provocative, entertaining, or playful.

Various accounts exist of artistic interventions in the UK, US, and Europe, including the ARIS project in Sweden (Styhre & Eriksson 2008), forerunner of the project described here. The projects were diverse, involving artists from different areas in contact with different sized groups of employees, and had varying success. In many, outcomes cited were intangibles in the form of different ways of thinking and doing with little business evidence of impacts.

THE RELATION BETWEEN DESIGN, ART, AND MANAGEMENT/INNOVATION

Although the academic discourses of design management and arts-in-management show little epistemological resemblance, there are many practical similarities. Both rely on a merger of knowledge from the faculties of art and of management. Art and design differ in the way that design is more purpose oriented and thereby could be seen more as applied art than as art in itself. Both art and design practice are taught in studios where individual learning and emotional inclusion are recognized. If the relationship of design with art is removed, it is no longer design, only technology/production (Johansson & Svengren-Holm 2008). Design deals with aesthetic relations and the senses of human beings, which are at the core of art, yet there appears to be a rift between design and art in our culture (Coles 2005).

Innovation provides one connection between management and design, in particular through the use of design and design thinking. Design-driven innovation became fashionable through Kelley's (2001, 2005) descriptions of IDEO's practices, Verganti's (2006) presentation of Italian designers, and numerous examples in the business press. Here we extend our understanding of "innovation" to encompass innovative organizational

change and development initiatives, as shown by Jahnke (2013). Organizational change has long been a theme of organizational theory, with organizational innovation consistently defined as the adoption of an idea or behavior that is new to the organization (Hage 1999). These frequently include changes in organizational culture, as the shared knowledge, values, meanings, and the “unconscious mental models” of organizational members (Smircich 1983). Prior research in artistic interventions suggests that some artistic interventions produce lasting and possibly innovative cultural changes, in addition to changes with immediate economic impact (Darsø 2004, Reaves & Green 2010).

TOWARDS ARTS-RELATED DESIGN THINKING

Metaphorically, designers have one foot in artistic work and one foot in production or technical implementation, thus designers are artistic and something more. Their artistic competence becomes clearer when considered in relation to artists working in similar processes. Confronting an initial indeterminate problem as “the blank canvas”, sketching as visualization or prototyping, and reflection in action are aspects of the work of both artists and designers, and also the most basic elements of design thinking.

The above literature review suggests that the discourses of art-and-management and design management each deal with interventions from artists and/or designers and that these interventions have implications that are interdiscursive in the sense that they affect organizations in ways that are far from restricted to traditional design or art perspectives. Both artists and designers can affect organizational culture and work processes, even if their work is not explicitly directed towards those areas: an artist works through emotions to create an experience, while a designer communicates that something exists for a purpose. Rather, the value of design and artistic interventions may be the side effects of the artistic work done.

The organizations, their goals, and artists are shown in Table 1 below.

Organization	Organization's goal	Artist's challenge (Developed by TILLT & organization)	Artist selected by TILLT
1. Pomona Balance Provides HRM services for businesses.	To give employees more power and creativity.	(1) Develop materials that present and clarify Pomona's services for staff and clients - film, print or experiences (2) Start a process to update Pomona's stated values in order to better market all of Pomona's activities and services.	Martin Bronze, magician and filmmaker.
2. Regional Newspaper	To reach new audiences.	(1) Reach new groups of readers (women and young people 20-40) (2) Develop sports and news pages (3) Develop the newspaper's look and content.	Linn Greaker, visual artist and web designer.

EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

Methodology

The empirical material comes from two Swedish projects, the KIA initiative (*Kreativa Innovationer i Arbetslivet* or Creative Innovation in Working Life) that are part of a larger European study of artistic interventions in working life. Researchers used a combination of qualitative methods, including informal conversations with company representatives at KIA conferences, and telephone interviews with the CEO, participants, and artists involved in each of the projects. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using an inductive and reflective method similar to grounded theory analysis (Glaser & Strauss 1967). All the work was conducted in Swedish. Here we analyse the empirical material using our theoretical framework and provide examples and quotations as illustrations for our arguments.

TILLT and its Role

The projects were established by TILLT (www.TILLT.se/in-english/), an organization that produces artistic interventions in organizations (the discipline can be any artistic form: dance, theatre, music, literary or conceptual), leading to both the artist and organization members rethinking what they do, why they do it, and how they work or operate, which is a key to development.

A member of TILLT, called a process leader, worked with organization leaders and their goals to develop a statement of need (“the challenge”) then appointed an artist based on an assessment of fit between the organization and artist (See Table 1). The artist used his or her competence to develop and manage the process in the organization, with the process leader providing support as needed. Projects lasted between 7 and 18 months. The organization's CEO evaluated the results and outcomes.

The Projects

The organizations appear to have few similarities, and project goals differ, though both deal with communication or cultural development on a group level. However, the details below show that the outcomes are much more alike.

1. Pomona – a magician/filmmaker works with company values.

The magician/filmmaker thought the employees “were using their heads too much”. “We think about processes and ... we talk and talk.... So the artist thought we needed to work with the body, so that became the essence of the whole thing”, said one of the participators. The artist therefore started with some simple exercises, “to release and be free”.

Initially the company wanted to make videos for their website about how their values show in their work. But after a few meetings participants realized that it was not necessary to film their work. Instead they worked with their artist as if they would make a film: working with role-playing and building crowd scenes based on their values. For example, one of their value principles was about ‘meeting all where they are’, meaning everyone should be acknowledged and treated with the same respect, whether it was an electrician or a customer or an employee. This is how one of the employees described it:

We made scenes such as, ‘how we meet an alcoholic, or a dark-skinned stranger, or a very wealthy person, or an impoverished person.’ In the different scenes we were testing company values against our own internal images, so we are able to deal with prejudices. We played some exaggerated scenes. We had to feel what it is to be a low status person - what is low status for us? So, we had to visualize it, or try to show it to each other. How did we look? How did it feel? There were plenty of these exercises.

At the end they had a day when everyone tried the different exercises. According to the CEO:

We laughed so much together, and perhaps the greatest benefit, we were clearly connected to each other even more. Now we have new energy, joy, and permission to be playful.

After the project ended employees continued to use role-playing as a problem solving method. In this way they became capable of seeing the situation and the problem in

a new perspective and thereby also capable of creating new solutions:

When we are stuck in a situation and don't know how to solve it, we ask a colleague to join us in role-playing to find new solutions.

The project was innovative in two ways: with the help of the artist, employees discovered new tools for their professional work and learned how to gain more energy from having fun together. The latter could maybe be classified as a cultural innovation, as new ways of behaving that were both accepted and encouraged.

2. A web designer-artist helps a newspaper innovate and find new target groups

This intervention concerns a newspaper that wanted to reach their target group of those who ordered subscriptions, “women 25-40 years old”. Employees also knew they communicated more effectively with elderly people than with younger ones. One of the participants described the process:

We met with the artist/web-designer each week. First it was about how to ‘open the senses’. We had to do different things -- all kinds of things. We could choose images to show different characteristics, or we could paint or draw ourselves and describe things. We went out and about with cameras to use them for different tasks, and so on.

After a month we started to talk about what we could do with our product to improve it. The only thing we'd already decided was that we should appeal more to a specific audience, women ages 20 to 40, ...and .. we are sometimes a bit old-fashioned. So, that was what should be improved.

We talked a little about how we could do it, and our positioning to make a fresher newspaper. We did some survey research on the town, asking what people thought about the newspaper and so on. We discovered that most people liked the newspaper - but it scored high on giving an archaic impression. We continued with identity studies of the type: If you had to give the newspaper names and ages as a person - whose name and age would you give? And if the newspaper was food - then it was home cooking. What animal did the newspaper resemble - a Saint Bernard dog!

But we came to some answers. Page two was incredibly dull and not read by many. Instead we decided to have some lighter material on that side, called ‘the chronicles.’ We hired some skillful young women writers to write about different themes: children, sex education, entertainment, and the environment- things we learned were important issues for women. We’ve added some lighter material, such as amusing events, photos from readers, surveys, and questionnaires. We linked it to our Facebook page where we write about things separately from the newspaper and where we get a lot of opinions.

We keep working to try to expand the news and introduce a new angle, what happened but adding some additional items, and giving the story more life by putting people in focus. We are trying to be a little more alert, become fresher. We have accomplished a strategic move. Overall, there has been an improvement, certainly a facelift.

The newspaper employees have also started a more structured way of holding meetings. Every morning they have a short meeting when they plan the work of the day, and one day each week they have a longer meeting when they plan for the long run. It has helped create more order and be more proactive, they say. This is probably not what you primarily expect from an artistic project - that it will create order and more anticipation. But here they have found that “it is easier to be creative if you have a base to stand on, so you know what you have to fall back on”.

The CEO identifies three major benefits: First, innovation -the newspaper has become more attractive to younger readers; second, cohesion - the group was strengthened in working together, and third, they have become braver - “we dare to try more ideas. Before we killed ideas when we sat and discussed. Now we often test and see. It may not work every time, but we’ve tried it. We’re braver like that.” Here there has been an innovation in the product and also in ways of communicating with the customer. While these are not “new to the world” innovations, they are markedly different from former practices in the company, and are certainly considered innovative by those who work there.

Summary of the Artistic Interventions

At the beginning almost everyone involved asked, “What has working with an artist to do with our organization?” and early stages of the projects were described as “messy”. Some projects began with a meeting that provoked participants or

discussed issues unusual for work. As time went by, working with the artist became more “natural”, the projects ended in a company-wide event where participants demonstrated their learning and engaged other members of the organization in their new ways of working.

According to the respective project leaders, both projects met their goals. Tangible results were achieved in the repertoire of role-plays created at the HRM-services company, and the changing focus of the newspaper. Results were also described as “creating more energy and laughter”, “access to our creativity”, or “more courage and insight”.

The process and changes were not of the type typically described in management and organization theory, but more in line with Strati’s (1999) observation that organization theory has no smell, taste, sound or other sensual dimensions, while organizations in real life are full of them. The interventions, while clearly related to organizational development with the artist acting as consultant, are more aptly described as artistic interventions. Many participants credited their artist with having particular skill in guiding the process.

ANALYSIS

Here we analyze the cases using elements of our theoretical framework.

Innovations

The two projects resulted in innovations in products, services or changed organizational processes. Results from the artistic interventions are not “artistic” or directly related to the artist’s field. However, in addition to changes in specific ways of working or communicating, participants came away with some more general creativity or ways of working with an open process orientation. From the organization’s point of view, social innovations with increased creativity and enthusiasm were as important as product or process changes.

Artistic Process

Each artist used his or her process knowledge and artistic competence perspective at three levels. First, they used their technical competence, not directly, but for purposes of the intervention at hand. At an underlying level, the artist used his or her abstracted competence to build trust so that participants would fully engage in the activities. At the most basic level, the artists used what we call an open process orientation, practiced by all artists, by relying on their emotion in the moment as the intervention developed to guide participants and the process.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Artistic interventions in organizations can be similar to the interactions of designers when they bring “design thinking” into a company. We therefore propose that the discourses of artistic interventions and design thinking are intellectually similar, leading to theoretical awareness of similarities in the competences that designers and artists bring into the company. This ensures that the artistic component is always a part of designerly work.

Comparisons between the characteristic of artistic interventions and design interactions in companies show:

- Both introduce a more general creativity to individuals, thereby enhancing the creative culture of the organization.
- Both are process oriented, working with a combination of open and structured processes, and give organizations an experience of how to handle an open process, something that may be taken for granted in the artistic world but alien for many technicians and managers.
- Both introduce new activities (tools) and new ways of working/thinking/approaching problems by focusing more on opportunities than on analysis.
- Each artistic intervention had a number of levels. The workshops were somewhat related to the artist’s specific skill, and about learning how to focus or how to find new approaches to problems or opportunities, or about organizational change as a form of innovation. Design thinking interactions include many of these aspects.
- An important part of a successful intervention is the selection of the designer or artist to lead the process. In this study TILLT played a “matchmaking” role in clarifying the organization’s challenge and selecting the artist. This process was quite different from the traditional way in which managers select designers directly from a design consultancy: the manager presents the problem to the designer and they establish the brief together. The “matchmaking” role may be essential when the artistic competence does not have a direct correlation with the problem or challenge of the client organization. Further research is needed determine the extent to which it exists or would be beneficial for design-led intervention.

We consider both artistic and design interventions as deliberate ways to make the company more creative by using the “tools” or competencies from these professions, although the tools are not as important as the results. In

such situations we often speak of a designer bringing “design thinking” into a company. Thus “design thinking” could be understood in a similar way when an artist enters a company to facilitate an intervention.

We now ask, “Why is there no link between artists and designers in the context of design thinking?” The relation has seldom been discussed or mentioned: art and design belong to two different traditions, and art-and-management and design management even more so. Consequently, there has been little cross-disciplinary research. However, we believe that examining design thinking opportunities as artistic interventions will strengthen our understanding of the process.

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