



Organizational Behavior Meets Marketing

Increasing Productivity with Art in the Workplace

Edward Lisi, D.B.A., Ngoc (Anna) Nguyen (GA)
Trefz School of Business
University of Bridgeport, Bridgeport, CT

Foundational Information

Art has potential for providing commercial value, social value, and essential (or intrinsic) value (Findlay), but none of those values are constant due to fluctuations in markets, tastes, and cultures. Nineteenth century French painter and art critic, Thèophile Gautier, proclaimed: “As a rule, when something becomes useful, it ceases to be beautiful” (Findlay). That “rule” can be refuted when exploring the value of art as a productivity driver in the workplace.

Productivity in the workplace has been explored extensively over the past 200 years. Early studies that demonstrated increases in crop production and steel production are cited as helping to propel economic growth in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These studies fostered the development of better machinery and better work conditions. Until the early 1920s the focus of productivity was on how an individual’s performance could be improved, as exhibited by the work of Frederick Taylor. A major shift in the field occurred with the Hawthorne studies of the late 1920s and early 1930s. The experiments, which took place at the Western Electric factory in Hawthorne, Illinois, established that the performance of employees is influenced by their workplace surroundings. Most notably, this research changed the lighting in different parts of the factory and recorded resulting productivity changes. The experimenters concluded that the fact that management was concerned about employees, rather than the changes themselves, was the key driver of the increased productivity (Roethlisberger and Dickson). Although the specific findings of these studies have met continued scrutiny, the studies acknowledged the importance of workplace conditions in the overall productivity equation.

Frederick Herzberg’s Two Factor Theory, exploring intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, cited certain workplace factors as motivational factors, those that can cause job satisfaction, and others as hygiene factors, those that, when they’re missing can cause dissatisfaction. He classified work conditions as hygiene factors (Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman).

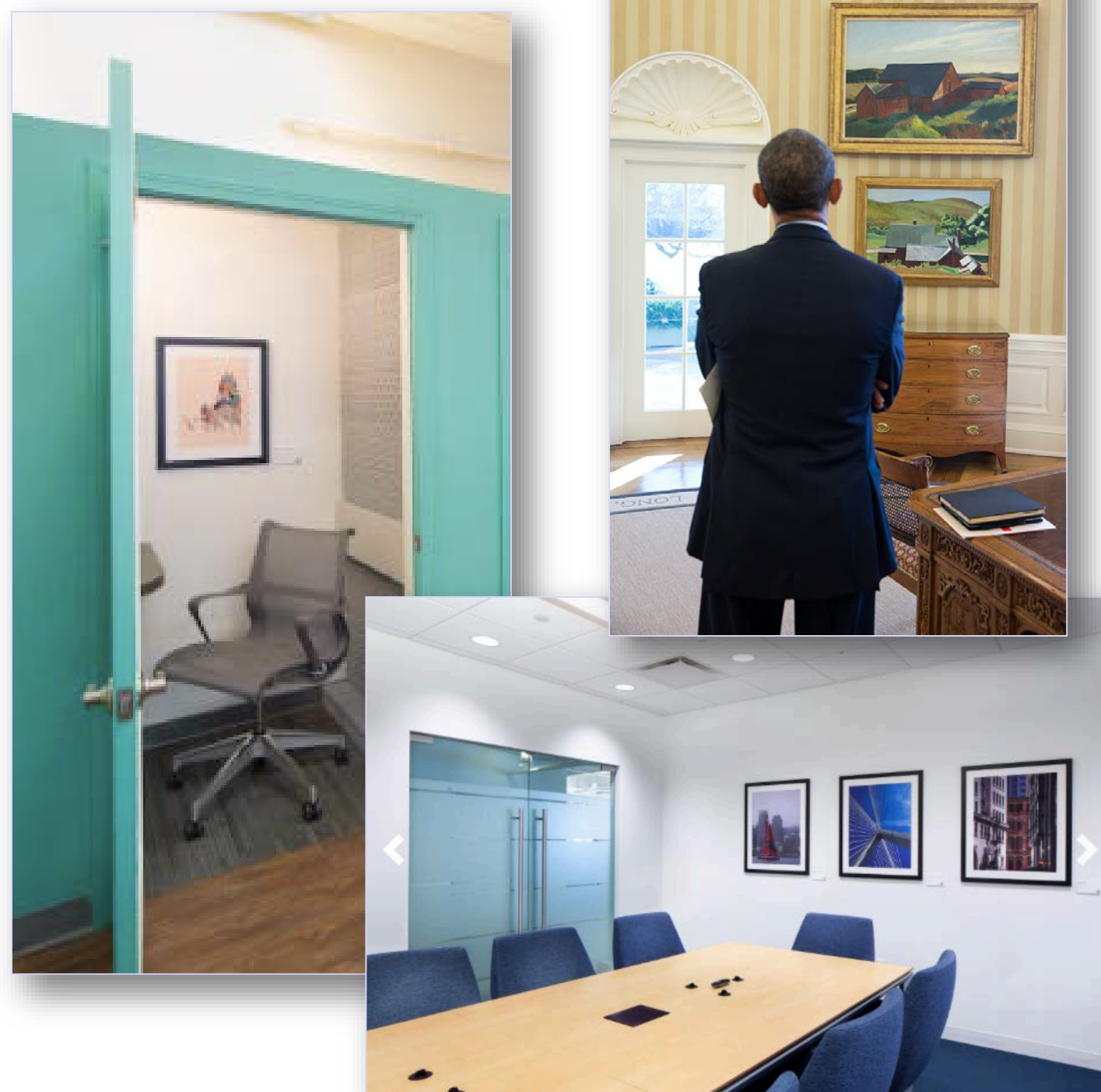
The Power of Art in the Workplace

Recent research exploring the importance of art in the workplace, demonstrated that art can serve as a motivational factor, resulting in increased employee productivity. Thomas and McCrae, in their 2012 research paper “Art Works! The importance of art in the workplace,” demonstrated that the workplace can, in fact, affect job satisfaction, motivation, creativity, mood, and productivity. Various research efforts continue to explore the specific value of art as either a merely decorative function or capable of serving as a productivity driver. Several examples of findings from this research include:

- A 2013 study by the British Council for Offices suggested that 61% of workers believe artwork inspires them to think and work more creatively.
- A Zurich Insurance Group study suggested that having art visible in the workplace increased perceived productivity by 14.3% in comparison to that of a control group who had no art visible from their workstation.
- The New Hampshire Business Committee for the Arts and the International Association of Professional Art Advisors found that 82% of 800 surveyed workplace occupants in 32 companies across the United States felt that artwork was important to their workplaces. Further, it found that art in the workplace helps businesses address key challenges such as reducing stress (78% agree), increasing creativity (64% agree), and encouraging expression of opinions (77% agree) (Higginbottom).
- A simple experiment was conducted by two psychology professors in the United Kingdom. Employees were observed performing an hour’s worth of administrative tasks in an office without visual stimulation, and also in an “enriched” office space decorated with art and plants. In the office with art, employees worked approximately 15% faster than those in the austere office (Haslam & Knight).
- A survey by the International Art Consultants Group (2013) found that 94% of respondents believe that art makes their workspace more welcoming and 61% agree that it also stimulates creativity.

- A Harvard University study classified the impact of art in the workplace along five dimensions: promoting social interactions, eliciting emotional responses, facilitating personal connection-making, generally enhancing the workplace environment, and fostering learning (Smiraglia).

Worker involvement in the selection of art is also an important factor. In a 2012 study the British Council for Offices reported that 95% of employees cannot see any art from their desk, 70% of offices have no art at all, and where art is present, 55% are dissatisfied by the selection on display. Deloitte polls employees regarding the selection of art for specific workplaces and reports employees feeling a “sense of ownership” in the art that is displayed (Thomas & McCrae). Research by the Exeter University School of Psychology found that employees who are involved in the design and layout of their workspaces are happier, healthier, and up to 32% more productive. The study further found that people working in “enriched” spaces (decorated with plants and art), were 17% more productive than employees in lean spaces (Higginbottom).



Questions to Drive Further Research

The research is directional and certainly interesting, yet it leaves open many questions. Including these:

- Does the size of the art matter? Is a large wall painting more productivity-driving than a smaller piece?
- Does the number of artworks matter? Would an employee be more productive if more art was visible as work was getting done?
- Is the effect different in various work environments, for example an office vs. a factory?
- Does the value of the art matter? Would an original work of art be as effective at influencing productivity as a print or even a poster?
- Is three dimensional art, sculpture for example, as much a driver of productivity as two-dimensional art, for example a painting or print.

- Does art in public spaces, even outdoors at a workplace, influence productivity, or do employees need to see the art as they work for it to have a positive productivity effect?
- How much should employees be allowed to have a say in the selection of art for individual workspaces and for public spaces?
- What are the most effective methods for conveying information about art’s influence on increasing productivity in the workplace?

Next Steps

An effort will be made to secure funding for additional research from businesses that have established leadership in the art world. These can include: Christie’s and Sotheby’s, leading auction houses in the field of fine art; Park West Galleries, auctioneers of art on over 100 cruise ships; art.com, the world’s largest online retailer of wall art – from hand-painted originals to posters, with more than 19 million customers in 150 countries; turningart.com, corporate art advisors; and the museum stores of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Chicago Art Institute, well known distributors of art for use in residential and business environments.

Selected References

- British Council for Offices (2012). *Making Art Work in the Workplace*. London: British Council for Offices
- Findlay, M., (2012). *The Value of Art*. Munich: Prestel.
- Haslam, S.A., and Knight, C. (2010). *Cubical, Sweet Cubical: The best ways to make office spaces not so bad*. Scientific American
- Herzberg, Frederick; Mausner, Bernard; Snyderman, Barbara B. (1959). *The Motivation to Work* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley.
- Higginbottom, K. (2016). *The impact of art in the workplace*. Forbes,
- Roethlisberger, F.J. and Dickson, W.J., (1939). *Management and the Worker: An Account of a Research Program Conducted by the Western Electric Company, Hawthorne Works, Chicago*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Smiraglia, C. (2014). *Artworks at work. the impacts of workplace art*. Journal of Workplace Learning, 26:5.
- Thomas, J., & McCrae, P (2012). *Art Works! The importance of art in the workplace*. Work&Place 1:1, 11.

