The Beauty of Project Work
Using Aesthetics in Project Management

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Abstract: Many media designers have a background that is closely related to art. They produce aesthetic experiences. But can their work processes also be determined through aesthetic evaluation? The work is usually done in project work process that at the first glance seem to have nothing at all in common with aesthetic.

Organisational aesthetics have been studied from the environment of the organisation point of view, where the workplace's aestheticization is thought to help, for example, when a company or department changes its strategy. Because of the flexibility of aesthetic thinking and aesthetic values, it can even be applied to evaluating things where previous thinking and operational principles are no longer sustainable. Aestheticization can be seen as an expedient to raise value of some everyday life manoeuvres like cooking, or also as a pedagogical or therapeutic instrument.

The aesthetic beauty in project work can be crystallized to fluency, which means, amongst other things, that the work is divided to the project workers adequately and they produce outcomes useful to the organisation in a given time.

1. 1. Introduction

My suggest here is to apply aesthetics within the research of new media project work as we intuitively use aesthetical criteria when valuing our results of work, its environment and the processes we are part of [11]. The projects produce works, which are already estimated aesthetically, as well as the visual environment of the work places [12]. Because of the flexibility of aesthetic thinking and aesthetic values it can even be applied to evaluating things where previous thinking and operational principles are no longer sustainable. Artistic thinking can be seen as an expedient to increase the value of some everyday life manoeuvres like cooking, or also as a pedagogical or therapeutic instrument [6], but even more value can be achieved if aestheticization can be applied to work places and within discussion of work. An aesthetic approach can be one way for investigation, amongst others like psychological, sociological or anthropological approaches.

2. New Media Project Work

The birth of project management is said to have taken place in the Manhattan Project, in which the first atom bomb was invented and created in the USA during the early 1940s. The Cold War and the Apollo space programs, amongst others, developed project management and soon the method was also implemented in other

business areas [5]. Now the method is applied within all possible purposes. In the media branch, the traditions are usually derived from film industry. They even can use term 'production' instead of 'project'.

The concept 'new media project' is here understood as a project, that has a body of content delivered or broadcasted, in such a way that the audience can chose, affect or interact with it by some means. The media can cover interactive TV, different forms of digital games, or even services that include media. It can cover artistic or non-profit projects as well as commercial projects. Different institutions and private financiers may finance new media projects. In the new media research a typical financiers in Europe are for example the European Commission and national funding agencies. The consortium includes one or more research partners and companies. A financier can also be a commercial publisher, who self-finances its projects, but also a small company with non-commercial or commercial projects financed by customers. The productions can vary from informational or educational DVDs to entertainment genre like interactive broadcasted TV programs.

In spite of huge differences between the wide ranges of different types of productions they also have similarities. They all need the involvement of many disciplines: graphic designers, 3D designers, animators, film makers, film editors, cinematographers, programmers, software designers, interaction designers, technicians of many types, sound engineers, marketing and so on. The list is long as the types of projects vary a lot.

Multiculturalism is another common factor. The large amount of people working in the projects increases the costs. The rise of the costs forces the projects to seek finance from various sources, often from abroad, resulting in international project groups being formed.

For the same reasons project groups are usually a combination of people from different organisations. Thus the project forms a, so-called, virtual organisation, formed temporarily from real existing legal entities, companies, institutions, and units. It should start working effectively from the very beginning of the project.

New media projects are also commonly research projects. They typically include both technical and conceptual research and development work in order to reach the goals. Because of the research character there are always uncertainties.

3. Aesthetics in new media project work

The outcomes or the results of a media project are an obvious target for aesthetic evaluation. Films, TV programs, media art and audiovisual games are discussed through aesthetic values, but can the working environment of the people who produce these works, be evaluated through the same methodologies? Creative individuals, the workers inside creative industries, are working in various circumstances from one project to another under various kinds of contracts [3]. Essential in the project work is the deliverable, the work itself. Everything in the project must be designed to produce the best possible outcome.

Aesthetics have traditionally been applied to art objects but also in nature and the environment in general. A project has a duration and roles as in a theatre play and it can carried out like a natural experience. The project actors are simultaneously doers and spectators, as in an interactive media installation. Project management is not art but it is part of the project actors' experience, which can be demarcated from the overall stream of events of their life. That experience is meaningful because it affects the result or deliverable of the project and if the experience is positive, the greater is the possibility that the project produces aesthetically more sensuous works or products.

Environmental or green aesthetic thinking goes beyond the surface and finds beauty from ecology and environmental protection matters as well as from sustainable development principles. By studying the traditional ugly or even disgusting, its value to tradition, ecology or maybe even economy, its significance can be found [9, 1]. The environment is no longer seen as something outside the realm of humankind. We are seen as part of the environment and can even go deeper and count for example history inclusive in the aesthetics.

The environment of project work is in the organisations where the projects are executed. They are usually designed mainly for activity other than executing projects, because the organisations' main business is something else than project work. The organisation structure and the structure and the division of the project itself is a design according to the nature of project. The various project practicalities like planning the project processes, monitoring of the deliverables and budgets and people, and so on, must be planned according to the legislation and rules but also according to a smooth execution of the project [7].

The organisational aesthetics has at least two directions; the others study how in the organisation the art influences to the people working there [12, 11] and the others see the aesthetics as a pattern that connects the different aspects of beauty in the organisation. Rafael Ramirez proposes that with the help of aesthetics it is possible to propose that "cooperation and competition will be considered ugly or beautiful in terms of the responsibilities – positive or negative – that they attribute to the partnership involved".[8]

Projects are most often viewed from an organisational or management point of view; how to identify requirements, how to establish clear and achievable objectives, how to balance the competing demands for quality, scope time and cost, and how to adapt specification plans, and approach to the different concerns of the various stakeholders [7]. Could we instead think by what means the targets were achieved, were the conditions of the project workers appropriate, or were people fairly treated, and, how the individuals felt and reached their goals professionally or pecuniary, was the work in the project pleasant and smooth, and so on. The list can't be fixed and it is neither rational nor compulsory to try to make it such, because each individual target of investigation, what ever it is, needs its own strategy for investigation.

Project management has bureaucratic characters in the sense that there is need for control of the costs and the usage of resources. In practice, the financiers require a certain visibility for the work done in the project i.e. how much the organisations have put resources, like work and usage of machines and premises etc., into the project. To collect this information they have tools to log how many hours the employees are spent in the project by, as well as other related costs. In many organisations these tools are given by general management or even the owners of the organisation. Poorly advised purchasing decisions for management and administration tools made by higher management can severely reduce the joy of work in an organisation. It is important to notice that, the organisation must firstly find out the right project management methods most suitable for the organisation and secondly implement the appropriate tools to make it possible, not the other way round. [4]

4. Conclusions

Three hundred years of aesthetics research has broadened the concept of aesthetics from art, because it was found that the original definitions do not cover all the fields of art [10], and finally the concept of green aesthetics [2, 9] and on its coat-tails organisational aesthetics [8, 11] have appeared in the field. As aesthetic thinking can give new perspectives to organisational and environmental research, it can also add to the

knowledge for project management research. Especially with projects, that produce aesthetical works as media productions, it is alluring to use aesthetics even in the work.

Project management and organisational research could also gain, and broaden in scope, by allowing aesthetical thinking in respect of consideration of work places. For example, enjoyment at the work place is an aesthetical question, so why not evaluate it aesthetically. The quality of work and the working environment are more and more important as people need to exist in these for considerable amounts of time during their working life. Questions of, for example, how to research flow are, however, difficult. Visual anthropological methods have been used in some organisational research cases [12]. The field is young and more research will be needed to find the right methods as to how relevant results can be found.

5. Acknowledgements

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