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Making Art Work – Art In The Workplace

How creating an aesthetic physical environment can lead to increased productivity and heightened morale.

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The words “corporate culture” have become something of a mantra for businesses in the 21st century. Whether it’s group bonding efforts, volunteer initiatives, or any of an ever-increasing number of activities, companies are taking a renewed interest in how culture, as it relates to both interpersonal relationships and the physical aspects of the work environment, can have a big effect on how employees feel about the businesses they work for. And, not surprisingly, a lift in employee morale can elevate a lot of other things as well. Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that it can lead to a big jump in productivity. “If you want your team to be innovative,” Leah Lamb says in a Fast Company blog, “then create a physical environment that reflects that.”

Many professionals take this very seriously, and that’s where the world of art and business often intersect. Most influential employers do not discount the role that art plays in the workplace. It is a tool for increasing productivity, creativity, well-being, and collaboration among their employees.



LinkedIn Office, New York

How Does Art In The Workplace Increase Productivity?

Office design, from the color of the walls to the arrangement of furniture and presence of art, is a big factor in creating positive, productive surroundings for employees. “Not only does office design determine whether or not people’s backs ache, it influences how much they accomplish, how much initiative they take, and their overall professional satisfaction,” S. Alexander Haslam and Craig Knight wrote in their *Scientific American Mind* article *Cubicle, Sweet Cubicle*. Haslam and Knight say that employers should pay more attention to the overall experience that an employee’s work environment provides because it can boost “productivity at minimal cost.”

The presence of art is an essential part of the workplace design. A number of studies have shown the effects that color can have on mood and productivity. The principles of feng shui also propose a strong influence of art on both residential and corporate design. Hence, art as a major factor in fostering a collaborative and productive work environment is being taken more seriously than ever.

Robert Rosenkranz, director of The Rosenkranz Foundation, is a believer in the power of art to enforce greater productivity. “As an avid and lifelong collector of art, from ancient sculpture to modern photography and even conceptual moving images, I believe in the influence of our aesthetic surroundings upon our shared daily experience,” he writes on his [website](#). “Unique, original, and thoughtful art enriches our cultural and workplace lives, creating a vibrant and more productive environment. An inspired surrounding fosters creativity, regardless of an employee’s department or role within the organization.”



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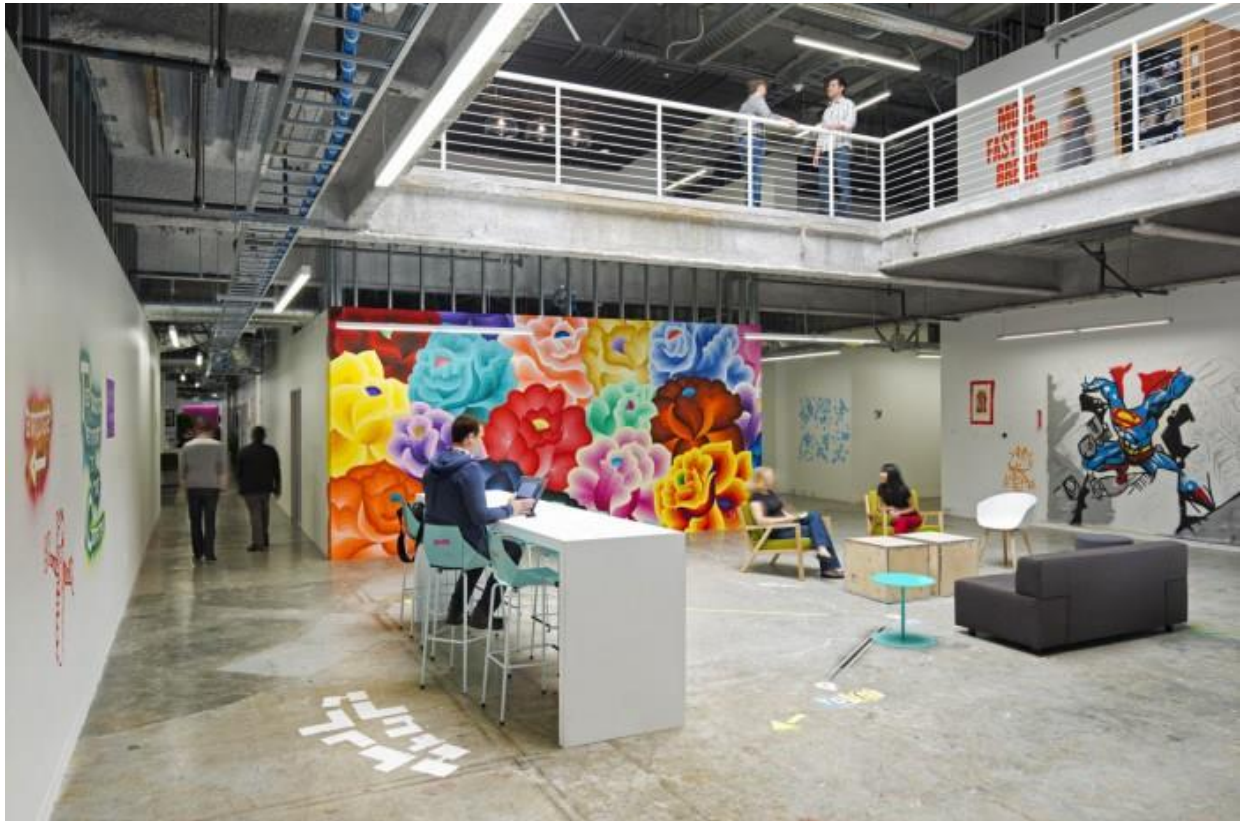
Rosenkranz is far from the only one who thinks that acquiring art has tangible, real-world benefits for companies. “Art is viewed by many businesses as a nicety and not a necessity”, Jeffrey Sklaver, principal at Maryland-based consulting firm ArtMatters notes. But for Sklaver, that is an out-of-date, and rather misguided assumption. In a piece he wrote for Work Design magazine, he outlines several advantages that well-chosen art pieces can offer. “Properly executed, art energizes

and personalizes a workspace”, he says. “It reflects an attitude, sets a tone and more importantly ties together all the design elements.”

How Else Can Companies Make Use Of Art In The Workplace?

According to Jeffrey Sklaver, art’s role in the workplace is a varied one. Art does not only provide a psychological boost. There are also some very down-to-earth ways in which it can improve the efficiency and productivity of a work environment. The numbers of individual offices are in decline due to the popularity of the open-office concept. Art can help to orient workers within those large, open spaces. Calling art “a way-finding tool,” Sklaver says that images and colors can be used to help reference areas or locations. These help in directing workers through a space, while giving the overall environment a sense of unity and logic.

He also finds that art has an important role to play in another aspect of the open-office landscape. With the drop in private individual spaces for employees has come an increase in meeting rooms or rooms where employees can go to gather their thoughts or brainstorm in small groups. It is essential to give these rooms an ambiance that is different from the hubbub of the main office. Artwork can be a key solution for this, providing these rooms with unique personalities that are tied into the function of the space. A large black-and-white cityscape photograph could take the concept of urban energy and give it a more muted, relaxed feel. A colorful, motion-filled image could lift the level of energy and promote interaction. The possibilities of using art to create these unique small-scale environments are almost limitless.



Facebook Office, Menlo Park

But whether the goal is to inspire and motivate employees, or to just help them navigate an increasingly complex work environment, there is no doubt of the benefits that art can bring to a business among many of today's most successful, cutting-edge employers. Several of those companies successfully use art to create an environment to foster creativity and productivity. At Facebook, interest in the effect that art can have on employees is so strong that the company has its own artist-in-residence program, which is headed by Drew Bennett. Bennett, who was first hired in 2007 to paint a series of murals on the walls of Facebook's Palo Alto, Calif., offices, now heads up a program in which artists are regularly brought in to create works that are specifically conceived for the spaces of the huge campus that Facebook now occupies in Menlo Park, as well as for the offices that the company occupies in New York and Dublin. Creating what Bennett has called a "dialog between many different visual languages," Facebook has used art to both provide a physical embodiment of its corporate culture and a motivational tool to make that culture part of how its

employees carry out their work.



*Artwork by Michelle Blade
Image courtesy Facebook*

Facebook's extensive program to create art for its offices is a strong indicator of the interest in how art can motivate and inspire employees—and in turn have a beneficial impact on a company's productivity and bottom line. On Forbes' Leadership blog, Victor Lipman puts that belief in succinct, convincing terms. "I'm not sure it's easy to calculate a classic ROI [Return on Investment] from having art in the workplace," he notes, "but I do believe you can (very roughly) estimate what I call ROE, Return on Environment, as there are subtle but valuable benefits workplace art can bring to a corporate culture."

Lipman says that the decision to install art in offices has more to do with creating an overall mood. It is not about making an aesthetic statement of any sort. Putting up art, he says, "shows management cares enough about the employee experience—and the customer experience—to have a thoughtfully maintained facility that people feel good about working in."

Installing Art In The Workplace

A company's decision to install art has more to do with creating an overall mood than making an aesthetic statement. Using art in the workplace shows that the management has some interest in the employees' experience. However, involving the

employees in the process can also be very beneficial. For Haslam and Knight, simply installing the art is not enough. Their research indicates that art is more beneficial to employees when they are part of the decision-making process. "Employees are happiest and most productive when they control the look and style of their work areas," they note. Companies interested in fostering a collaborative workplace should take note of this when they are making arrangement to purchase art.

Just as programs to make employees healthier and happier often have the concrete result of creating a workforce of more focused, productive workers, so can the presence of art in the workplace unite those workers under a shared sense of purpose.

Employers who see inspiration and motivation as worthwhile goals would be wise to take advantage of the benefits that the well-thought-out installation of art in their office can provide.

Art is not the only way that visual elements can determine the mood and general productivity of an office environment.

However, it certainly is a key player. While many factors can affect how employees feel while they are at their desks or interacting with their colleagues, art can provide the extra element that makes a space unique. The properly chosen piece of art can firmly establish a room's identity and purpose. It can bring people together and help to make a company's goals and higher vision apparent.