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Bring in the Arts and Get the Creativity for Free. A Study of the *Artists in Residence* Project



View on Chalmers University of Technology (Göteborg, Sweden). Wikimedia Commons

Overview

Researchers **Alexander Styhre** and **Michael Eriksson** from **Chalmers University of Technology, Department of Project Management (Göteborg, Sweden)** report results of the **Artists in Residence (AIRIS)** project, taking place in Sweden between 2005 and 2006. Through AIRIS, artists were allocated for 10-month long cultural projects inside companies to stimulate the adoption of **new perspectives** and **creative solutions** among co-workers.

Research topic and results

The paper reports the activity of a Swedish project named Artists in Residence (AIRIS) wherein artists including musicians, painters, and actors and directors, dancers and choreographers collaborated with a regular company or workplace during a ten-months project, aimed at helping the co-workers think in new and creative terms.

In Sweden, the culture sector is largely funded by tax money and only to a minor extent by ticket sales. Culture workers and artists are also facing periods of unemployment. On the other hand, Swedish industry and public sector organizations are working under great pressure to become more effective and to do more with less. During such conditions, organizations become less capable to think in new terms and to fully exploit the creative competencies of its co-workers. The AIRIS project is one arena where artists and industry may join hands and learn from one another.

Through the AIRIS program, artists are allocated in a specific firm or organization for a site-specific cultural project. However, the cultural project actually includes three separate goals: (1) a *culture-political goal* to create an arena where industry and the culture sector and its agents can meet and interact, (2) a *business development goal* aimed at enhancing the creative capabilities of industry and public sector organizations, and (3) a *labour market goal* where new arenas for employment opportunities for professional artists are being created.

Studies of projects like AIRIS shows that there is a great potential in bringing artists into industry. The study concludes that there are many benefits from making the world of artists and the world of work intersect, but there is also a certain demand on the participant to fully commit to the project.

Motivation for research

This paper tries to address the shortage of studies pointing at the actual use of aesthetic skills and competencies in organization. In the debate in popular management writings, there is an emphasis on unleashing the creative potential of the co-workers. However, tapping in to such resources is by no means a trivial matter, and years of specialization into certain domains and activities may not easily be abandoned to embrace new thinking. In addition, several authors suggest that one must recognize the aesthetic qualities of organizing, thereby broadening the scope of possibilities. The concept of aesthetics is here used in a rather broad manner to denote a range of qualities and virtues. On the one hand, the theoretical background of this paper takes into consideration the organization creativity literature emphasizing the need for novel thinking, and on the other hand, the literature on aesthetics assuming that an aesthetic mindset is capable of improving the creative capabilities of the co-workers.

Contribution to the field

Rather than merely assuming that aesthetics is a useful resource in organizations and particularly in creative and innovative organizations, or advocating an increased exchange of ideas, the AIRIS project is one of few projects actually bringing artists and companies together. The outcome is mixed but overall positive. Cases like the AIRIS project are valuable for the literature on creativity and innovation, as well as for practitioners, because they show that there are opportunities for making use of skills and experiences from the domain of the liberal arts in regular workplaces through the adoption

of a long-term artist-in-residency model.

Key learnings

It is in general rather complicated to draw any conclusion from the AIRIS project because of the variety of activities implemented and local conditions. The research is also complicated by the fact that out of a total of sixteen projects over 2005-2006, only eleven may be regarded fully accomplished projects for various reasons. The quantitative evaluation of effects of the project in terms of work climate did only show small direct effects. Still, the so-called anecdotal evidence suggests that representatives of the participating companies and workplaces expressed their appreciation for being given the chance to join the project.

Alexander Styhre and **Michael Eriksson** published this paper jointly as researchers from Chalmers University of Technology, Department of Project Management (Göteborg, Sweden).

Read full research paper [here](#)