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REVEALING AESTHETIC VALUE IN ORGANIZATIONS: THE ROLE OF AESTHETIC PROPERTIES IN ORGANIZATION DESIGN

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Abstract

In many design disciplines such as product design and architecture experiencing aesthetic value by its users and observers is stimulated by adding or attributing aesthetic properties to the design. For organization design, revealing and investigating aesthetic value is an important objective of the research field of organizational aesthetics. What kind of aesthetic properties induce the feeling of aesthetic value among employees? Are in (applied) arts and other design disciplines recognized aesthetic properties such as formal properties (e.g. balance, repetition, and climax) and representational properties (memories, identification) also applicable in organizations?

This study examines stimuli that trigger aesthetic experiences of 286 employees in 5 professional organizations. And in particular, it investigates the role of aesthetic properties which constitute the basis for experiencing aesthetic value. This study shows that formal properties discussed in the arts disciplines and other design disciplines such as product design and architecture, also seem to play a major role with relation to aesthetic experiences in organization design. Formal properties such as alignment of activities and alignment of personal goals with organization goals can be considered as strong triggers for aesthetic experiences and experiencing aesthetic value in organizations. This research also introduces a new framework for

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This study was part of the research of Steven de Groot within the context of his dissertation on organizational aesthetics.

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organizational aesthetics and offers a design causality for increasing aesthetic value in organizations.

Keywords: organizational aesthetics, aesthetic experiences, empirical aesthetics, aesthetic properties

The role of aesthetics in the design principles within the most design disciplines like architecture, product design and theatre is undeniably accepted. In these design disciplines both functional value and aesthetic value are distinguished to afford the user and observer. The aspect of affordance was introduced by Gibson (Gibson, 1977) and refers to what an environment offers (initially for animals) in terms of the possibilities to perform activities and fulfill needs. Later several design disciplines translated this term into human-centered design. However, for decades organizations have been dominated by the perspectives of the Good and the Truth originated by Plato. A strong focus on functional value avoid organizations to allow aesthetic value in their design. Motivated by the strong development of industrialization in the last century, and enhanced by the rules of *Scientific Management*, standardization efficiency and effectiveness dominated manager's minds and actions. During these ages, the perspective of the Beauty for long has been neglected in organizations (e.g. Guillén, 1997). But now, with the emerging development of knowledge intensive work, organizations seems to realize that the 'human resource' no longer wants to be managed by outdated rules from the machine age (e.g. Pascale et al. 2000). In 'modern organizations' (better to speak about 'post-modern organizations'), employees are triggered by aspects such as responsive and self-organization (Pascale et al. 2000), sensible and sense-making (Hasan et al., 2007; Guillet de Monthouw, 2007), appreciative inquiry (Avital et al., 2008), life affirming (Whitney, 2008), and creating value (Bryan and Joyce, 2005; Zandee, 2008) which all show relations with underlying needs and values of employees. With a changing function of organizations, there seems to be an argument and space for the Beauty perspective in organizations. A dominant focus on functional value of organizations

could be changed or enriched by adding aesthetic value to organizations. Although at the end of the last century the field of organizational aesthetics offered some first ideas, these ideas are hardly originated from empirical research.

This study examines aesthetic experiences of 286 employees in 5 professional organizations and secondly investigates the contribution of these aesthetic experiences to aesthetic value of organizations.

Design causality of beautiful organizations

For distinguishing aesthetic value in organization design I introduce the design causality developed by Roozenburg and Eekels (1995). Experiencing a degree of aesthetic value can be strongly compared to the earlier mentioned experienced sum of aesthetic judgment and emotion. This design causality describes the fundamentals and methods of product design. First, they argued that a design is made by people for its properties. Because of these properties it can fulfill one or more functions. By fulfilling functions a design satisfies needs, and gives people the possibility to realize one or more values. Transferring these fundamentals, the design of the organization needs to change as a consequence of changing roles and needs of the employees in this case. Assuming that when needs and values of employees are changing, like sense making ([Weick, 1995](#)), meaning or experiencing aesthetics, considering that properties can fulfill one or more functions, and by fulfilling functions a design satisfies needs that give people the possibility to realize one or more values, also the properties will have to change as well. This design causality is expressed below (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Design fundamentals Roozenburg and Eekels (1995)

If we want to add or disclose *aesthetic value* in organization design, in organization *form*, we could utilize this design causality for developing beautiful organizations and we must collect data about employees' needs and organizations' function and properties.

Value and needs concern the *subject* part of the object-subject interaction, i.e., the organization and the employee.

The design fundamentals of Roozenburg and Eekels (1995) claim that 'form follows value'.

In this study we aspire to combine *aesthetic value* with functional value to improve employees' organizational engagement (e.g., affective commitment), because we think like argued by [Guillén](#) (1997), Gagliardi (2001), and Witkin (2009), that aesthetic value ('seeking beauty or harmony') should be part of organizational design beyond theoretical, economic, political, social, and religious value (Allport et al., 1960). *Aesthetic value* is assigned to the object people perceive and based on the aesthetic judgment and the caused emotion of the observer (Mothershill, 1984; Santayana, 1896). Literature on aesthetics is very unanimous in the effects of experiencing aesthetic value by describing the outcomes of aesthetic processes. Experiencing aesthetics causes feeling of *pleasure* (e.g. Mitias, 1988; Mothershill, 1986; Osborne, 1986; Santayana, 1896), *sensemaking* ([Weick](#), 1995; Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004; Scruton, 2009) and triggers *positive emotions* (e.g. Ittelson, 1973; Freedman, 1975). So, aesthetic value satisfies *needs*, for individual employees as well as for organization's management. This can be considered as a motivational perspective on design, like Zhang (2007) supports. This perspective explains human's various needs, the relationship among needs and psychological well-being, and environmental factors and their impact on goal-oriented commitments. As a human-made thing, he argues, 'ideally, purposely envisioned to fulfill human needs and to support human values. Creation and design should then be guided them by such understanding' (Zhang, 2007, p.46). The purpose of (re)design then is to positively support employees' motivational needs like emotional needs (emotion and affects).

This vision on the function of a design strongly endorses the development of ‘modern organizations’ in which employees are triggered by aspects such as responsive and self-organization (Pascale et al. 2000), sensible and sense-making (Hasan et al., 2007; Guillet de Monthouw, 2007), life affirming (Whitney, 2008), and creating value (Bryan and Joyce, 2005; Zandee, 2008) which all show relations with underlying needs and values of employees. If we agree with organization’s new function, offering employees aesthetic experiences, we need to examine how to install this function in organization’s properties and form. Here we enter the area of *aesthetics*.

It can be emphasized that in literature on aesthetics generally is accepted that aesthetic experiences are triggered by objects because of the recognition and attribution of *aesthetic properties* (such as formal, representational, and expressive properties) as part of these objects (e.g. Goldman, 1995; Zangwill, 1995). Based on the literature, a tripartite division was proposed of formal properties, expressive / sensory properties, and representational ‘properties’ (Goldman, 1995; Wagner, 1999). Expressive properties (color, sound, etc.) for *attraction*, representational properties (symbolic value, history, values, etc.) for *identification*, and formal properties (harmony, balance, tension, etc.) for *structuring*. *Formal properties* concern aspects such as harmony, balance, repetition, climax, and grouping or the Gestalt properties like simplicity, predictability, and motif. Many designers of different design disciplines like dance, product design, and architecture recognize the important role of formal properties as part of design. Wagner (1999) even speaks about ‘the principles of design’. In the theory on aesthetics *identification* is linked with the *representation* of the work of art (e.g. Parker, 2007; Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Representational properties concern ‘phenomena mediated by interest’ (Zemach, 1997), and fulfill a role of proximity, recognition and identification for the observer (e.g. Rancour-Lafierre, 1999). For organizations, I related

these type of properties to the aspect of *goal and value congruence* for a good person-organization fit and affective commitment and (e.g. Herrbach, 2006; Parry, 2006). *Expressive properties* concern secondary qualities or so called sensory properties like color, sounds, tastes, smells (e.g. Zangwill, 2003). This type of property is most related to the personal taste and style of the observer (e.g. Reber et al., 2004; Cooper et al., 1992) and can be recognized in organization stimuli like house style, interior, and exterior.

But before defining and operationalizing organization's aesthetic properties we face the challenge to examine in which parameters of organization form, in which organizational aesthetic stimuli (OAS), employees experience aesthetic value.

Organizational Aesthetics Framework

The field of 'Organizational Aesthetics' initially was explored in the 90s' by Sandelands and Buckner (1989), Strati (1999, 2000), Ramirez (2005), Gagliardi (1996), Guillet de Monthoux (2000), Alvesson and Berg (1992) and Linstead and Höpfl (2000). Simultaneously this was stimulated by the growing attention of 'human' issues in organizations like meaning, spiritually and human development at the end of the last century and the budding challenge to combine managing with designing (Simon, 1996; Boland and Collopy, 2004).

Literature on organizational aesthetics aspires to overcome this gap and the few contributions on aesthetics in organizations mainly raise the question whether aesthetics in work and organizations could be an additional or a new perspective on organizations. And they proposed stimuli such as physical space (e.g. Strati, 1999; Alvesson & Berg, 1992), product and services (e.g. Akkermans et al., 2004) or organizational decision-making (Dean et al., 1997) in which employees possibly could experiences aesthetics, building upon a dominant paradigm in literature on aesthetics that aesthetic experiences are triggered by

stimuli in the object perceived by the observer (e.g. Goldman, 1995; Zemach, 1997; Wagner, 1999).

For examining and describing OAS as a part of organizations' *form*, the challenge we face to finalize the proposed design causality of beautiful organizations, I propose a new organizational aesthetics framework (De Groot, 2014). This framework was developed based on the affective events theory (AET) of Weiss and Cropanzano (1996).

Figure 2 Organizational aesthetics framework (De Groot, 2014)

This theory is based on the idea that employees want to remain in organizations that provide them positive work experiences because they value these experiences and expect them to continue (Meyer and Allen, 1991). And AET was developed for a broad range of affective events, experiences and emotions in organizations. Aesthetics in organizations can be considered as a specific experience with specific features and characteristics. AET is often used and well validated by quantitative and qualitative data in many studies and published in the peer-reviewed literature (e.g. see Fisher and Ashkanasy, 2000;).

The interaction between the object (organizational aesthetic stimuli hidden in and work events and its context, the organizational design parameters such as structure, strategy and culture) and subject (employees' personal characteristics) proceeds via an aesthetic process. Leder and colleagues (Leder et al., 2004) provided a process view on the aesthetic experience. The *aesthetic process* globally starts with observation (perceptual analysis). Via interpretation (implicit memory integration and explicit classification) and report (cognitive mastering). This process will lead to aesthetic judgment (a result of the evaluation of the cognitive mastering stage) and a degree of activation or arousal (ibid), together causing a emotion such as enthusiast, excited or happy, in particular for positive aesthetic experiences

(PAEs). The perceived emotion can be considered as a measure for perceived aesthetic value. But emotions in the context of work and organizations can also be strongly related to the phenomenon of *affective commitment*. [Meyer and Allen \(1991\)](#) introduced the concept of affective commitment, which can be defined as ‘positive feelings of identification with, attachment to, and involvement in the work organization’ ([Meyer and Allen, 1991, p.375](#)). The phenomenon of affective commitment is often measured by valuing variables like pride, work pleasure and flow experience ([Meyer and Allen, 1991](#)). Affective commitment, often regarded alongside continuance commitment and normative commitment, as one of the components of organization commitment, shows the strongest correlation with job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, role conflict and attendance and is the strongest and most consistent predictor of organizational outcomes like employee retention and performance (e.g. Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; McFarlane and Wayne, 1993). In this article I will only describe the relationship of OAS with aesthetic value.

Research objectives

Initially we want to have a first insight of what people consider as beautiful and ugly in their organization and which stimuli (*Organizational Aesthetic Stimuli: OAS*) trigger aesthetic experiences. The results of the interviews give a first insight into the stimuli in which employees experience beauty and ugliness in their organization. Yet, the interviews were conducted within a limited set of companies using managers as key informants.

To have a better understanding of aesthetic value in organizations a more varied type of respondents were involved. It applies not only a repetition of the question asked during the interviews among a larger and other target group, but also the examination of employees’ aesthetic judgment of the list of acquired OAS. And finally, we want to examine the

relationship between the appreciation of OAS and aesthetic value experienced by employees.

Methodology

Research context

In order to obtain first insight of what people consider as beautiful and ugly in their organization, ten managers from ten randomly selected Dutch organizations were interviewed. This resulted in a unique list of OAS. Three organizations responded to a call in the course of this investigation, supported by CNV and Inaxis (Dutch Ministry of Home Affairs), to compete for a place on the list of beautiful organizations in the Netherlands. The other organizations were selected because they were listed or described as beautiful organizations by people or they responded to an appeal via social media. The degree of saturation of obtained data determined the number of managers which were interviewed. After interviewing 10 managers, collected OAS covered all dimensions cited in literature on organizational aesthetics such as products and services, image or the physical space and no new categories were discovered.

Second, these 10 interviews gave insight in the perceived *revenues* of the attention to beauty. All managers together mentioned 25 perceived *revenues of attention to beauty*. The most frequently cited *revenues* are good image of the organization (mentioned by 60%), high customer satisfaction (mentioned by 60%), high employee commitment (mentioned by 60%), proud employees (mentioned by 60%), and positive feedback about the organization from the environment (mentioned by 50%). Synthesizing these revenues, a strong relationship with *affective commitment* can be determined (e.g. [Meyer](#) and Allen, 1991).

Third, we collected data of 286 respondents representing 5 Dutch organizations. These organizations responded to a call in the course of this investigation, supported by CNV and Inaxis (Dutch Ministry of Home Affairs), to compete for a place on the list of beautiful organizations in the Netherlands. Three of these organizations also participated in the interviews. We choose for a random design as the phenomena of aesthetics is believed to be a

general phenomenon that is present in every business setting. In addition, by selecting a diverse set of companies we are able to look for common factors that influence perceptions of aesthetic value and its outcomes (Mill, 1843).

Data source

In order to obtain first insight of what people consider as beautiful and ugly in their organization managers were interviewed during a conversation of approximately one and a half hour to discover manager's first associations with organizational aesthetics. The answers of the ten managers were registered by taking notes. These notes were converted into 10 stories about beauty in 10 organizations, which were approved by the respondent. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the initial interviews, we worked with a standard questionnaire and the individual stories were approved by the respondents (member check). Second, 286 respondents representing 5 organizations were in particular asked to appreciate 31 OAS and to register OAS (426 OAS) which trigger aesthetic experiences. In this survey (offered via internet after sending a personal e-mail with the login code) respondents were also asked (by an open-ended question) what they perceive as beautiful and ugly in their organization to allow for comparisons with the results of the ten interviews. Respondents were selected via *purposive sampling* in order to obtain a balanced mix of personal characteristics like age, sex, education, role in the organization and years of service of random chosen respondents.

Measures

During a semi-structured interview each manager was asked open-ended questions about aesthetic experiences and their perceived effects. Each manager was asked four open-ended questions:

1. Which OAS in your organization do you experience ugliness and beauty?
2. To what extent does the organization use aesthetics as a strategic starting point?
3. How are these aesthetic principles implemented?
4. What are the revenues of attention to aesthetics in the organization?

In this article I will only reflect on the answers given to the first and fourth questions.

The survey for examining employees' aesthetic judgment of 31 OAS was developed based on two sources. First, an exploratory study on phenomena of beauty and ugliness in organizations resulted in a list of 18 OAS which were mentioned by at least 2 out of 10 managers (20%). This list of OAS was supplemented with OAS distinguished in literature on organizational aesthetics.

The survey was divided into two parts: First, the respondents were asked to appreciate the 31 OAS like cooperation, qualities of colleagues, and interior on a 5-points Likert-scale (beauty / ugly: strong agree – strong disagree). Second, respondents are asked to answer open questions, including the questions 'What do you experience beautiful and ugly in your work and organization?'

In open-ended question to reflect on the acquired data of the interviews as well in a statement (proud, job satisfaction, flow, and a grade for organizational aesthetics in their organization) the respondent scored on the level of application (5 points Likert-scale).

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of this empirical study, we developed a survey in which the selected OAS are categorized according the parameters of the ESH model (structure, culture, employees, management style, strategy and system (Van Burg, 2011). This arrangement creates of form of consistency. This is corroborated by high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (> .7).

To ensure external validity the survey was completed by respondents of different organizations in order to examine whether results could be generalized (Van Aken, 2007; Van

Burg, 2011). Second, the perceived effects of attention to organizational aesthetics (see the interviews) are quantitatively measured during this study..

Analytical approach

The obtained interview data was manually coded (template coding based on categories found in literature). This was preceded by a cross-case analysis. Given the limited number of interviewees and the exploratory nature of the study we took a conservative approach by considering codes that were mentioned by at least 2 out of 10 managers (20%).

To answer the research questions of this study two canonical analyses were performed to examine the relationship between aesthetic experiences and affective commitment and aesthetic value. In this article, only the results of the relationship between aesthetic experiences and aesthetic value is described.

A canonical correlation analyses (CCA) was conducted to examine the relationship between two variable sets: set 1, 35 OAS and set 2, dependent variables ‘beautiful work’, beautiful organization’, and ‘attention to aesthetics contributes to performance’ representing *aesthetic value*. CCA is an exploratory tool to determine whether two sets of variables are independent of one another or, conversely, determining the magnitude of the relationships that may exist between the two sets (Hair, et al., 2010). This modeling type approach was also used to explain the nature of whatever relationships exist between the sets of dependent and independent variables, generally by measuring the relative contribution of each variable to the canonical functions (relationships) that are extracted. An important advantage of CCA is ‘that they may best honor the reality of psychological research’ (Sherry & Hanson, 2005, p.38). Sherry and Hanson argue that most human behavior research examines variables that possibly have multiple effects and multiple causes. Determining data results, such as classical univariate (e.g., analysis of variance [ANOVA], regression) and multivariate (e.g., multivariate ANOVA [MANOVA], descriptive discriminant analysis) statistical methods that

separately investigate singular causes and effects may distort the complex reality of human behavior and cognition ([Sherry and Hanson, 2005, p.38](#)).

The qualitative data was manually coded (selective coding, based on the defined categories of OAS after the initial interviews). This was preceded by a cross-case analysis. Given the large number of respondents we took a progressive approach by considering codes that were mentioned by at least 30% of respondents. Secondly, these OAS like cooperation and development opportunities are categorized according to the six organization design variables (strategy, system, structure, culture, staff, management) of the ESH-model, based on the McKinsey's 7-S model for organization design developed by Waterman and colleagues (Waterman et al., 1980). Categorizing the OAS cited by the managers according to the parameters or clusters of the ESH-model we can see that the items are fairly evenly divided among the parameters, which show first indications that aesthetic experiences are triggered by a wide range of OAS.

Results

Organizational aesthetic stimuli in organizations

The most named organizational aesthetic stimuli (OAS) are interior / exterior of the building (mentioned by 100%), people orientated management (mentioned by 50%), influence of staff (mentioned by 40%), and personal development of employees (mentioned by 40%). In addition, three managers mentioned the organization as a meeting place (i.e., social aspect), the visual communication (e.g. house style and printed material), and their contribution to society as important OAS's. The ten interviews resulted in a first insight of what people consider as beautiful and ugly in their organization. The question about what employees perceive as beautiful in their work and organizations was also asked at the 286 respondents who completed the survey.

Respondents registered 426 OAS in which they experience beauty. Most frequently mentioned OAS are development opportunities (15% of mentioned beautiful aspects in work or organization), colleagues (11%), collegiality / cooperation (12%), culture (12%), autonomy / independence (7%) and workplace (interior / exterior) (6%) and contacts with clients (4%, particularly high (11%) at Rabobank Woudenberg).

Interesting is whether the list of mentioned OAS of the first study exhibits saturation and is similar to the list of this second study conducted among a much larger group of respondents. The top-10 of most mentioned OAS in both studies is quite similar although the sequence of OAS is different. But it can be determined that the list of OAS acquired by the interviews shows a sufficient degree of saturation.

Respondents registered 281 OAS in which they experience *ugliness*. Most frequently mentioned *ugly OAS* are autonomy / independence (12% of mentioned ugly aspects in work or organization), workplace (interior / exterior) (9%), attitude of colleagues (8%) and internal communication (6%).

Inertia and quality of decisions and workplace (interior / exterior) are often relatively mentioned by UMCG-employees. Rabobank Woudenberg relatively often mentioned autonomy / independence as being ugly in their organization.

The categories of ugly OAS differ from the list of OAS. Ugly aspects of the organization mentioned by more than three of five organizations are mainly aspects of *management* (like their focus of finance / cuts, professionalism management, contact with / access to management and attitude of management / hierarchy), inertia and quality of decisions, not supporting ICT / tools, organization size and staff composition. These OAS don't have a mentioned 'equals' at the beauty side of organizations and can be described as dysfunctional. It seems that OAS which cause negative aesthetic experiences (NAEs) express more

(dys)functional value than aesthetic value. OAS that cause NAEs, seem to be more judged on an ethical basis instead on an aesthetic basis.

Relationship appreciation of OAS with aesthetic value

A canonical correlation analyses (CCA) were conducted to examine the relationship between the set of 31 OAS (resulting in aesthetic experiences) and *aesthetic value*. Figure 3 shows the individual canonical loadings for each stimulus.

Figure 3 Data of canonical correlations 31 OAS with aesthetic value

The *first* function of this second canonical correlation (see Figure 4) represents the optimal linear combinations of dependent variables and the canonical correlation coefficient representing the relationship between them. This relationship is strong, regarding their correlation (.68). The significance tests show a very high level of confidence (.000) in the results. By examining the canonical loadings of both two sets, the predictor variables can be determined. For set 1 all 31 OAS show a loading between .46 and .75 with most strong loadings (>.70) for style of management, business approach , attitude towards our environment, all work towards the same goals, working atmosphere, internal cooperation and coherence of things. For set 2 also all dependent variables show loadings >.3 with aesthetic value. *Beautiful work* shows the strongest correlation with aesthetic value (.89). Also redundancy was examined. For this analysis, the relation is relatively strong (CV2-1: .591).

Figure 4 Relationship 1 Aesthetic experience with aesthetic value

Noteworthy is the very strong canonical correlation between aesthetic value and the (perceived) effect on *performance*. This amounts to 0.78. This confirms the premise that affective commitment contributes to organization performance (e.g. Allen and Meyer, 1990; Rhoades et al., 2001).

The *second* canonical function of this second relationship (see Figure 5) shows a different result. This canonical function represents a second unique and independent relationship between the dependent variables (beautiful organization, beautiful work and attention to aesthetics contributes to performance) and independent variables (OAS). Only four OAS show a canonical loading $>.30$ with set 1, which are balance between organization goals and employee goals (b10), internal communication (c14), organizations image (e22), and coherence of things (f31). Most of the OAS concerning *organizational coherence* and *transparency* such as work towards the same goals (d19) and alignment between management and employees (c15) all show high canonical loading in the first function of this relationship. It might be interpreted that *transparency* contributes to the perception of *beautiful work*, but also could affect the awareness of ugliness in organization aspects.

Figure 5 Relationship 2 Aesthetic experience with aesthetic value

The *third* canonical function of this second relationship does not show canonical loadings for OAS $>.30$. The significance of this third canonical function is .014 which is too low to determine a reliable conclusion.

Thus considering these results of this analysis, organizational aesthetics (experiencing aesthetic value) can be considered as the *promise* to affective commitment as well as to performance . A hypothesis for future research could be that organizational aesthetics directly

as well as via affective commitment contributes to better performance.

DISCUSSION

Globally, two antecedents for having aesthetic experiences can be considered (e.g. Parker, 2007): 1) an object / stimulus (organizational aesthetic stimuli: OAS) and 2) a perceiver (the employee). For this study I apply the interaction-perspective which advocates that the object-subject interaction triggers the aesthetic process. This study in particular focuses on the OAS (as part of an object) that triggers aesthetic experiences and its typical aesthetic properties.

Three lists of OAS

This study resulted in three lists of OAS: most mentioned, highest appreciated and strongest (canonical) correlation with aesthetic value (see Figure 6). Remarkable are the differences between these three lists.

The differences between the lists often mentioned, high appreciated and strongest correlation could be explained by several *psychological phenomena*. First, studies of Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone (2001) and Fisher (2009) show that ‘it is important to remember that positive attitudes are not directly created by environments or events, but rather by individuals’ perceptions, interpretations, and appraisals of those environments and events.’ They refer to the large body of research on appraisal theories of emotion (Scherer, Schorr and Johnstone, 2001) clearly supports a critical role for the appraisal process in determining experienced emotion. Second, aesthetic experiences are triggered by perceptions. Perception is not necessarily based on reality, but is merely a perspective from a particular individual’s view of a situation (Robbins, 2004; Buelens et al., 2011). And third, it is likely that combinations of phenomena *affect heuristic, mere exposure effect, aesthetic induction, prototyping and familiarity* and *verbal overshadowing* play an important role by mentioning and registering

aesthetic experiences.

By asking employees what they experience as beautiful and ugly in their work and organization, they possibly will mention aspects which they initially associate with beautiful and ugly aspects in 'normal life', not work-related. This could be a first explanation why interior / exterior and cooperation is mentioned very often. These 'normal life' associations are probably functioning as *prototypes* for their aesthetic categories in their 'working life' (Leder et al., 2004). They feel *familiar* with these and they have a more positive attitude toward stimuli they have seen before (e.g. Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro and Reber, 2003), which could be related to the *mere exposure effect* (e.g. Zajonc, 1968).

By repeatedly questioning employees about their aesthetic experiences, probably the phenomena of *affect heuristic* (Zajonc, 1968) and *aesthetic induction* (McAllister, 1996) will appear. Employees mentioned and registered those aesthetic experiences that feel comfortable. Respondents spontaneously mentioned that they noticed more and more beautiful things in their organization while registering OAS. This sort of 'aesthetic self-fulfilling prophesy' and attention bias (Nisbett and Ross, 1980) could be related to the phenomenon of *aesthetic induction*. Respondents are applying aesthetic criteria based on empirical observations and are inclined to like and use it as the criterion for evaluation. This could be an explanation why in all cases employees appreciate similar OAS equally high. Finally, also the aspect of *verbal overshadowing* (Melchionne, 2011; Schooler and Engstler-Schooler, 1990) seems to be recognized in the collection of aesthetic experiences. Even if the phenomena of *affect heuristic*, *mere exposure effect*, *aesthetic induction*, *prototyping*, and *familiarity* are not relevant, employees will probably initially mention OAS which can be formulated easily. Particularly in relation to aesthetic experiences, Taylor (2002) introduced the term of *aesthetic muteness*: the difficulty of expressing aesthetic dimensions of experience in words. This could be a consideration why respondents do not mention aesthetic formal

properties - to a lack of meta-language - like coherence of things, represented by OAS like alignment of management with employees, alignment of organization goals with individual goals, alignment of activities and the composition of employees, which all show strong correlation with their final judgment of beauty in their organization. They possibly dispose their 'real judgment', because it is repressed in what they can express in language.

Considering these psychological phenomena, a combination of research methods is recommended. Only asking employees what they experience as beautiful and ugly isn't sufficient. Only by asking respondents to value their appreciation of mentioned OAS as well as to ask their appreciation for revenues of aesthetic experiences like their judgment about beautiful work or beauty in their organization, some of the mentioned psychological phenomena could be recognized and excluded.

I already determined that the measured 31 OAS are fairly evenly divided among the parameters of the ESH-model. We can also determine that the stimuli in which employees experience aesthetic value are context-related. For example, OAS mentioned by surgeons differ from OAS mentioned by teachers (De Groot, 2014). It should be emphasized that in literature on aesthetics generally is accepted that aesthetic experiences are triggered by stimuli because of the recognition and attribution of *aesthetic properties* (such as formal, representational, and expressive properties) as part of these stimuli (e.g. Goldman, 1995; Zangwill, 1995). So, following this reasoning, these collected and measured 31 OAS are the carriers of aesthetic properties, and it is more interesting to examine the generic aesthetic properties these OAS conceal. In terms of the proposed design causality of beautiful organizations, we want to determine which aesthetic properties we need to attribute or conceal for designing or developing a beautiful organizations (form).

In the beginning of this article I proposed a tripartite division of formal properties, expressive properties, and representational 'properties based on Goldman (1995) and Wagner (1999). Relating these aesthetic properties to those found in 31 OAS, an interesting image emerged.

Formal properties

Formal properties concern aspects such as harmony, balance, repetition, climax, and grouping or the Gestalt properties like simplicity, predictability, and motif (e.g. Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1999; Wagner, 1999). Many designers of different design disciplines like dance, product design, and architecture recognize the important role of formal properties as part of design. Wagner (1999) even speaks about 'the principles of design'.

At least six of the selected OAS, (alignment of management and employees, balance of organization goals and goals of employees, alignment of activities, working on the same goals, coherence of things and internal cooperation) can be considered as formal aesthetic properties like harmony and balance. All six formal properties show a very strong (canonical) correlation with the set 'aesthetic value' (.62 to .74). As a group of stimuli representing a type of aesthetic property, they even show the strongest relation with experiencing aesthetic value by employees. So, it can be concluded that experiencing a beautiful organization and beautiful work can be ascribed to the recognition of formal properties in organizations. And thus, formal properties discussed in the arts disciplines and other design disciplines such as product design and architecture, also seem to play a major role with relation to aesthetic value and experiences in organization design.

Interesting is that those formal properties distinguished in the arts and design disciplines in almost all cases are identified by direct use of one of the senses such as eyes or ears. In case of experiencing formal properties in work and organizations I conclude that in organizations stimuli such as coherence of things, alignment of activities or working on the same goals are

experienced by a *combination of senses* resulting in a sort of *feeling of coherence*. So in organizations, even a feeling of coherence, without directly observing it, strongly contributes to the employee's experience of beautiful work and a beautiful organization.

The presence of formal properties in organization design is sporadically suggested in literature (Dean et al., 1997; Gerstein, 1999; Rindova et al., 2010) or is expressed in the approach of *organization as a whole* (Gestalt) (Rindova et al, 2010; Peng, Wen-shien, 1988) and thus needs to be confirmed and further concretized.

Representational properties

In the theory on aesthetics *identification* is linked with the *representation* of the work of art (e.g. Parker, 2007; Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Representational properties concern 'phenomena mediated by interest' (Zemach, 1997), and fulfill a role of proximity, recognition and identification for the observer (Rancour-Lafierre, 1999). This mechanism is also identified by Zhang (Zhang, 2007) concerning the need for attachment, connectedness, and belonging to a group (*social and psychological needs*). Employees' qualities and work attitude - expressed in events like acts of colleagues and acts of management - as well as organization mission and goals (like to contribute to society) concern *representational 'properties'* and the importance of *value congruence* for a good person-organization fit and affective commitment and identification (e.g. Herrbach, 2006; Parry, 2006).

The importance of values in aesthetic experience in organizations is exhibited by a strong (canonical) correlation of employee's work ethics, internal cooperation, offered challenges, internal communication and products and services, development opportunities, and organization goals. Also *organization culture* (work atmosphere) could be considered as part of representational properties, Because of the strong relationship of these OAS with values, it

may be concluded that these OAS are of great importance to the role of identification of employees with the organization.

Expressive properties

Finally, *expressive properties* concern secondary qualities or so called sensory properties such as color, sounds, tastes, and smells (Zangwill, 2003) This type of property is most related to the personal taste and style of the observer (e.g. Reber et al., 2004; Cooper et al., 1992) and can be recognized in OAS like house style, interior, and exterior. In general, these OAS do not strongly (canonical) correlate with the set ‘aesthetic value’ and with the set ‘affective commitment’.

This type of aesthetic property does not strongly contribute to experiencing aesthetic value by employees. Thus, organizations that want to apply increase their aesthetic value should better pay attention to OAS which contain *formal* and *representational properties*.

But we need to be careful with jumping to conclusions. Parallel to this study I examined aesthetic experiences triggered during work events such as interaction with colleagues and customers. By using the method of *self-reporting* (a BEL-book: Beauty Experience Log Book), six respondents were asked to register daily their aesthetic experiences (ugly and beautiful) for a period of ten working days. For each registered aesthetic experiences respondents were asked to register their aesthetic judgment as well as the *emotional impact* (degree of *activation*) in an *Stendhal scale* (*affect grid*) with a zero (neutral) position and with positive values running to +4 (extremely beautiful) as well as negative values, running to -4 (extremely ugly). In this Stendhal scale (based on Russell, Weiss and Mendelsohn, 1989) respondents ranked their aesthetic experience on a scale of beautiful to ugliness (X-ax) and on a scale of high versus low emotional impact (Y-ax). Together they affect perceiver’s emotion

and the durability of an aesthetic experience (Russell, Weiss and Mendelsohn , 1989; Watson, Clark and Tellegen, 1988). The results show that both aesthetic judgment as well emotional impact strongly affects the triggered emotion of the observer (De Groot, 2014). Thus in future research, examining aesthetic judgments of OAS should be supplemented by the measurement of the degree of activation, for example by using the proposed Stendhal scale.

Spaces of understanding, relatedness, and exploration

This division of OAS on the type of aesthetic properties provides an initial role of aesthetic properties in the perception of aesthetic value in OAS. This overview (see Figure 6) shows that aesthetic properties distinguished in OAS show strong similarities with those distinguished in objects and stimuli in other design disciplines in which the role of aesthetics is irrefutably accepted, supported, and exploited.

For adding aesthetic value to organization design, in general there are two basic scenarios for developing beautiful organizations: 1) An organization development project that has ‘beautifying the organization’ as prime objective, because the organization insufficiently addresses and exploits beliefs, attitudes, (aesthetic) values of employees; and 2) An organization redesign project that is initiated because of functional problems or opportunities, but in which the organization redesigning uses aesthetic requirements next to the usual functional ones.

At the end of the last century Lefebvre (1991) developed a theory on *organizational spaces*. This approach, later was elaborated by Watkins (2006) and Beyes and Steyart (2011), was developed in particular for shaping emotions, attitudes, behavior, human experiences, of employee’s sensemaking, imagination and feeling of the people who use a given space (Wasserman and Frenkel, 2011). This approach could be applied to the mentioned first

scenario for beautifying organizations which insufficiently address and exploit beliefs, attitudes, (aesthetic) values of employees. Organizational spaces aspire to respond to needs of observers. In case of increasing aesthetic value to organizations, organizational spaces intend to trigger mechanisms for experiencing aesthetic properties such as formal properties. Therefore I defined three specific mechanisms (understanding, relatedness, and exploration) triggered by more detailed formulated aesthetic features of organizations (coherence, recognition and collaboration, accomplishment and mystery, see Figure 7), inspired by the environmental preferences model of Kaplan and colleagues (1989). They postulate that people will have two basic needs in environments (to *understand* and to *explore*) which they translated into the informational variables of *coherence* (immediate understanding), *complexity* (immediate exploration), *legibility* (inferred understanding), and *mystery* (inferred exploration).

Figure 7 Classification of aesthetic properties of beautiful organizations

Understanding and *exploration* can be considered as mechanisms or triggers which cause aesthetic experiences (e.g. Girod et al., 2003; Leder et al., 2004).

The space of *understanding* is formed by OAS which are (aesthetically) appreciated by employees because they *understand* organizational aspects such as alignment of activities and goal congruence. Because, at best, an organizational design is 'self-explanatory' and legible (e.g. Frey et al., 2010; Kaplan et al., 1989) which is thus in particular experienced because of the recognition of *coherence*, representing most formal properties.

The space of *exploration* meets employees' needs for *accomplishment* and *challenge*. Ending work, learning and realizing something, in particular with others, experience employees as beautiful (De Groot, 2014). This mechanism is represented by the OAS of goal achievement / task completion (and also goal progress). The literature on aesthetics distinguishes '*climax*' (as part of formal properties) as an important antecedent of aesthetic experiences (e.g.

Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1999). Second, challenge enable employees to continuously discover and desire *novelty* and *opportunity* (Barrett and Cooperrider, 1990) and to avoid the psychological mechanisms of *familiarity* and *prototyping* (e.g. Mastandrea, Bartoli and Carrus, 2011; Zajonc, 1980; Leder et al., 2004). Therefore ‘mystery’ is supplemented referring to an organization scene that promises the opportunity for employees to desire, descry and reveal new OAS and to be continuously surprised by new aesthetic experiences (Kaplan et al., 1989). Actually, this feature can be considered as a third *formal property* of beautiful organizations because of its strong resemblance with ‘perceptual problem solving’ (Ramachandran and Hirstein, 1999), and ‘complexity’ (e.g. Leyton, 1992; Beardsley, 1970), emphasizing again the importance of formal properties for increasing aesthetic value in organizations.

The space of *relatedness* is constituted by the aesthetic features of *recognition* and *collaboration*. Distinctive from the arts and applied arts, organizations can be considered as living and dynamic systems, in particular because they are formed by social constructs of people. Regarding to this issue, and referring to the comparison of OAS to Zhang’s (2007) motivational needs where a design should cater for, employees will also have *social* and *psychological needs*. The empirical data clearly showed that employees also experience aesthetic value in OAS because of their recognition and attribution of *representational properties*, in particular in recognition and collaboration. These type of feature is incorporated in very often mentioned OAS such as autonomy, organization goals and employee’s work attitude are much more difficult to specify. But they all seem to concern *employees’ and organizational values* (Zhang, 2007). Value congruence and goal congruence are important determinants of a good person–organization fit, affective commitment and identification (e.g. Carmeli, 2005; Herrbach, 2006). This group of 20 OAS accommodating representational properties can be divided into OAS concerning *organizational identity* (e.g. products &

services, organization mission and goals, and rituals in particular representing organization strategy and culture) and OAS concerning *work identity* (e.g. autonomy, feedback, and development opportunities). Because respondents do not distinguish these two types of identities from each other, these groups of OAS are labeled by one specific feature which is 'recognition'.

Collaboration for two reasons is defined as a separate aesthetic feature as part of the space of relatedness. First, values as well as goals are in particular experienced during interaction with colleagues. And second, another empirical study on organization aesthetics showed that employees very often having positive aesthetic experiences during working together (De Groot, 2014), which can be confirmed by the strong correlations of interaction with colleagues and customers, internal cooperation and working on the same goals with aesthetic value.

Interesting is whether there exists a specific hierarchy and independence among these essential aesthetic features. According the phases of the aesthetic process distinguished by Leder et al. (2004), there at least sequence in attention to the several features. Aspects of *coherence* are clearly recognized in the process of *perceptual analysis*. *Accomplishment* shows some similarity with the aspects of *peak-shifts* as part of process of *implicit memory integration*. *Collaboration* and *recognition* can be related to aspects of *cognitive mastering*. And finally *mystery* can be related to *previous aesthetic experiences*, in the sense that organizations anticipate the habituation to stimuli that previously caused aesthetic experiences. But for coming to an aesthetic judgement about organization beauty, a positive and negative judgement of organizations values and goals (*recognition*) can undo any judgement about *coherence*, and vice versa. It is conceivable that employees during their aesthetic process initially first observe whether their values and goal show some congruence with an organization before having attention to coherence. The conducted (canonical)

correlation analysis does not show some patterns of independency between the five features. So, the process model of Leder and his colleagues primarily seems to be appropriate to be applied to organizational aesthetics. A more specific and perhaps a revised order of phases of the aesthetic process model could be developed for future research in which the spaces of understanding, relatedness and exploration as well as the five specific aesthetic properties of beautiful organizations are better illuminated.

CONCLUSION

We started this study after concluding that the first contributions on the field of organizational aesthetics largely can be characterized by a high theoretical level and are mainly located in the ideas stage. The mentioned stimuli causing aesthetic experiences by employees such as products and services, decision making and interior were nothing more than suggestions. This study initially resulted in a list of OAS which triggers aesthetic experiences by employees and represents aesthetic value in work and organizations. The analysis shows that these OAS like cooperation and development opportunities are fairly evenly divided among the parameters of the ESH model. This means that aesthetic value is concealed in all the design parameters of an organization like was suggested by the first contributors of organizational aesthetics. This study provides a great understanding of the outcomes of attention to organizational aesthetics, in particular to experiencing aesthetic value. I showed that a set of 31 OAS strongly correlates with dependent variables ‘beautiful work’, ‘beautiful organization’, and ‘attention to aesthetics contributes to performance’ together representing *aesthetic value*.

But most interesting is the fact that a confrontation of organization design with aesthetics in organizations proved that aesthetic experiences in organizations are triggered by stimuli which contain five aesthetic features in particular coherence, recognition, mystery and

accomplishment (climax). These features are similar to those that trigger aesthetic experiences in the arts and in other design disciplines in which aesthetic value naturally is addressed as part of the design. Thus, triggers for aesthetic experiences in working life seem to be quite similar to those in the arts.

Responding to Guillén's opinion that for long organizations neglected the aesthetic context of organisational behavior, organizations now are offered first possibilities for revealing and exploiting aesthetic value in organization design.

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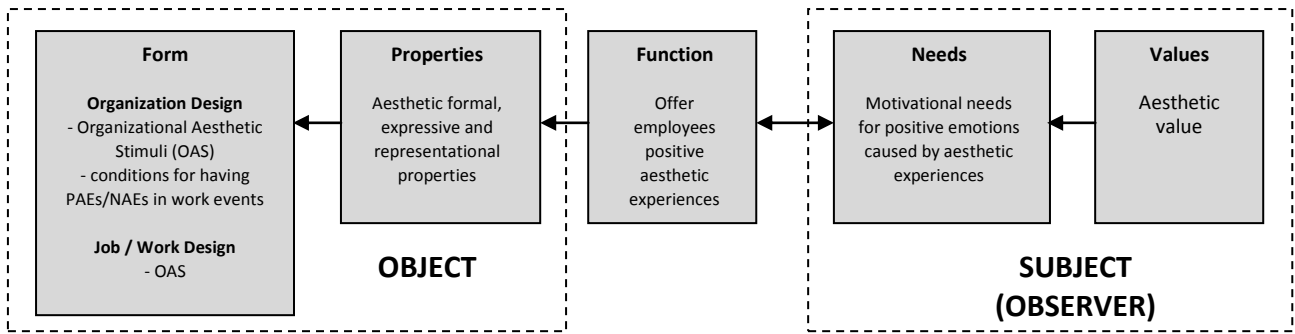


Figure 1 Design causality Roozenburg and Eekels (1995)

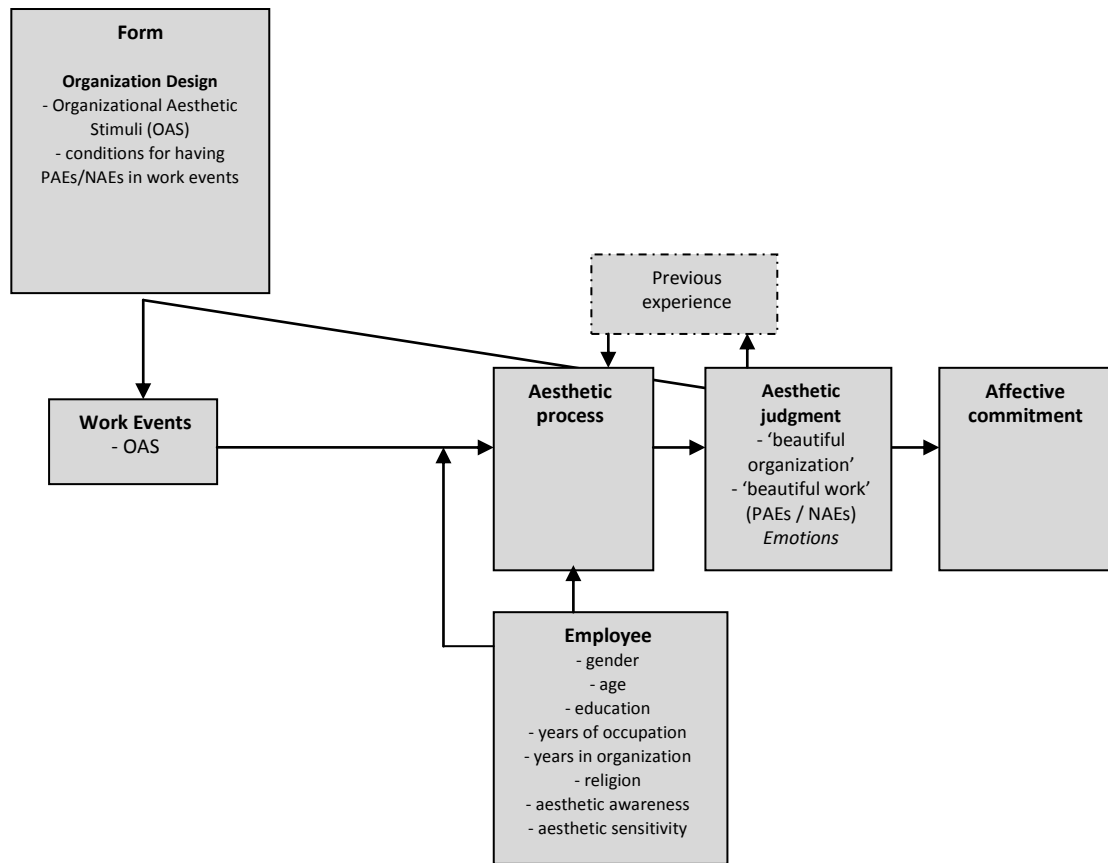


Figure 2 Organizational aesthetics framework (De Groot, 2014)

| Canonical Correlations | | | | | Canonical Loadings for Set-1 | | | |
|---|-------------|---------|--------|--|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| | ,683 | | | a01 Employees' qualities | ,466 | ,089 | -,138 | |
| | ,474 | | | a02 Composition of employees | ,508 | ,107 | -,103 | |
| | ,404 | | | a03 Work attitude employees | ,458 | -,264 | -,104 | |
| Test that remaining correlations are zero: | | | | | a04 Attention for craftsmanship | ,532 | ,172 | -,050 |
| | Wilk's | Chi-SQ | DF | Sig. | a05 Personal goals employees (their aspirations) | ,439 | ,024 | ,022 |
| 1 | ,346 | 286,177 | 93,000 | ,000 | b06 Qualities of management | ,620 | ,106 | -,106 |
| 2 | ,649 | 116,618 | 60,000 | ,000 | b07 Style of management | ,622 | ,219 | -,007 |
| 3 | ,837 | 48,080 | 29,000 | ,014 | b08 Offered challenges | ,715 | -,005 | -,146 |
| Proportion of Variance of Set-1 Explained by Its Own Can. Var. | | | | | b09 Attention to new ideas | ,478 | ,164 | -,030 |
| Prop | Var | | | | b10 Balance between org. goals and indiv. goals | ,633 | ,352 | -,055 |
| CV1-1 | ,362 | | | c11 Alignment of activities in our organizations | ,600 | ,199 | -,063 | |
| CV1-2 | ,029 | | | c12 Our house style | ,466 | -,075 | -,211 | |
| CV1-3 | ,019 | | | c13 Freedom (autonomy) | ,471 | ,048 | ,211 | |
| Proportion of Variance of Set-1 Explained by Opposite Can.Var. | | | | | c14 Informed about what is happening in our org. | ,602 | ,352 | -,205 |
| Prop | Var | | | | c15 Alignment management and employees | ,697 | ,193 | -,118 |
| CV2-1 | ,169 | | | d16 Business approach ('this is how we work here') | ,741 | ,175 | -,249 | |
| CV2-2 | ,007 | | | d17 Organizations rituals | ,642 | ,194 | -,020 | |
| CV2-3 | ,003 | | | d18 Attitude towards our environment | ,741 | -,098 | -,092 | |
| Proportion of Variance of Set-2 Explained by Its Own Can. Var. | | | | | d19 All work towards the same goals | ,753 | -,034 | -,019 |
| Prop | Var | | | | d20 Working atmosphere in our organization | ,717 | ,060 | ,006 |
| CV2-1 | ,591 | | | e21 Products and / or services | ,588 | ,087 | -,083 | |
| CV2-2 | ,171 | | | e22 Image | ,433 | ,330 | -,244 | |
| CV2-3 | ,237 | | | e23 Mission statement | ,627 | ,098 | -,121 | |
| Proportion of Variance of Set-2 Explained by Opposite Can. Var. | | | | | e24 Organization goals | ,635 | ,090 | -,027 |
| Prop | Var | | | | e25 Contribution to society | ,549 | -,144 | -,271 |
| CV1-1 | ,276 | | | e26 Contacts with our environment | ,529 | ,048 | -,217 | |
| CV1-2 | ,038 | | | f27 Workplace | ,430 | ,005 | -,266 | |
| CV1-3 | ,039 | | | f28 Interior or decoration of my work environment | ,556 | ,107 | -,142 | |
| | | | | | f29 Our (internal) cooperation | ,709 | ,079 | -,059 |
| | | | | | f30 Opportunities for development and deployment | ,691 | ,114 | ,024 |
| | | | | | f31 Everything in my organization is nicely in balance | ,723 | ,311 | ,036 |
| | | | | | Canonical Loadings for Set-2 | | | |
| | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | | | | | g35 'Beautiful work' | ,885 | ,265 | ,383 |
| | | | | | g38 'Attention to aesthetics contrib..to perfor.' | ,622 | ,257 | -,740 |
| | | | | | o3 'Beautiful organization' | ,777 | -,615 | ,135 |

Figure 3 Data canonical analysis Aesthetic experience with aesthetic value

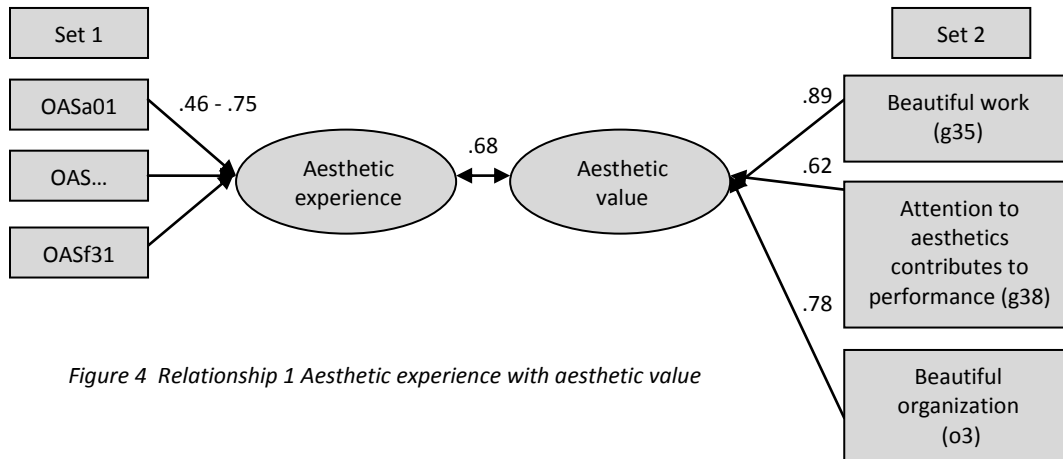


Figure 4 Relationship 1 Aesthetic experience with aesthetic value

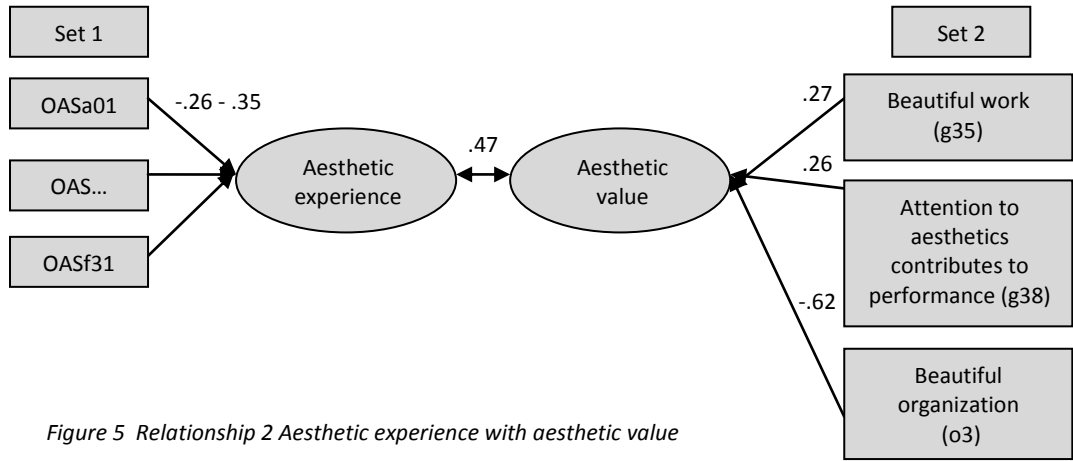


Figure 5 Relationship 2 Aesthetic experience with aesthetic value

| Most mentioned OAS in organization aspects | Highest appreciated OAS in organization aspects (on scale of 1-5) | Strongest correlating* OAS with aesthetic value |
|---|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interior / exterior (in 87% of the cases; 39x) STRUC 2. Collegiality / cooperation (in 53% of the cases; 57x) STRUC 3. Development opportunities (in 53% of the cases; 57x) MAN 4. Employees (competencies, attitude, ambitions of colleagues; 59x) STAFF (in 53% of the cases) 5. Autonomy / independence (in 47% of the cases; 36x) SYST 6. Culture (in 47% of the cases; 32x) CULT 7. Contribution to society (in 47% of the cases; 20x) STRAT 8. Offered challenges / opportunities in my work (in 38% of the cases; 14x) MAN 9. Contacts with customers STAFF (in 31% of the cases; 27x) 10. Variety of work (in 31% of the cases; 15x) SYST | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employee's qualities (4.7) STAFF 2. Organization goals (4.5) STRAT 3. Contribution the society (4.5) STRAT 4. Products and services (4.5) STRAT 5. Work attitude of employees (4.4) STAFF 6. Work atmosphere (culture) (4.4) CULT 7. Organization mission (4.4) STRAT 8. Goals of employees (4.4) STAFF 9. Development opportunities (4.3) MAN 10. Image (4.3) STRAT 11. Attitude to environment (4.3) STAFF 12. Contacts with environment (4.3) STAFF | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working towards the same goals (.75) CULT 2. Attitude towards environment (.74) STAFF 3. Business approach (.74) STRAT 4. Offered challenges (.72) MAN 5. Coherence of things (.72) STRUC 6. Work atmosphere (.72) CULT 7. Internal cooperation (.71) SYST 8. Alignment between management and employees (.70) SYST 9. Development opportunities (.69) MAN 10. Organization rituals (.64) CULT 11. Balance between organization goals and goals of employees (.63) MAN 12. Organisation mission (.63) STRAT |
| <p>* = canonical correlation, all sig < 0,5</p> | | |

Figure 6 Three lists of organizational aesthetic stimuli (OAS)

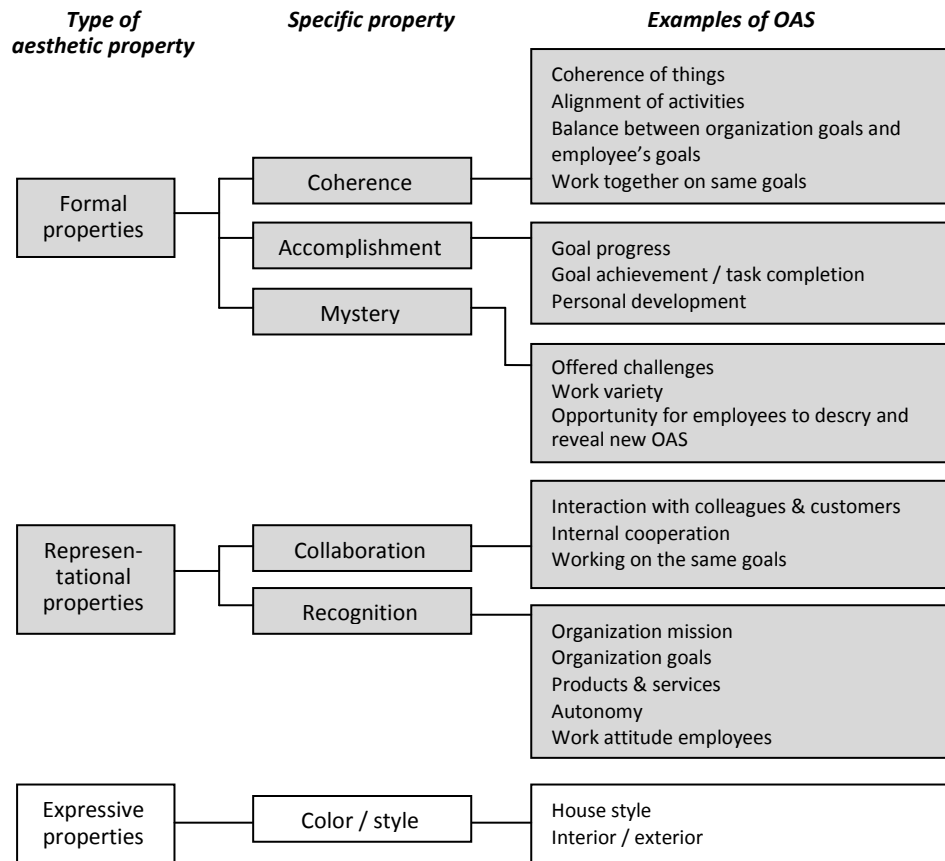


Figure 7 Classification of aesthetic properties of beautiful organizations