

‘Aesthetic Labour: A Motivating Factor to the Promotion of Creative Industries in Accordance with Cultural Management’

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Abstract

In recent years, the human factor attracts the particular interest of enterprises and organizations of the cultural industry due to the changes that take place in this highly competitive sector. The creation of positive prospects in the cultural and creative industries is derived from the adoption of modern strategies of Cultural Management, which should be intelligent and flexible in an effort to provide quality services and render a competitive advantage. The implementation and compliance with the rules of “Aesthetic Labor” is one of these strategies. The current globalized market of culture creates new prospects in the sector of services and cultural industries which impose specific rules on the appearance and the behavior of employees. Secondary sources of information confirm that employers demand from their employees to satisfy particular specifications in order to be hired and employed by organizations of the cultural industry. In order to justify the aforementioned theoretical framework, we have examined the cases of three Museums and two Boutique Hotels in Athens in order to describe how the theory of Aesthetic Labor is implemented nowadays.

Keywords: Aesthetic Labor, Cultural Management, Cultural organizations, Museums, Boutique Hotels

1. Introduction

In recent years, the human factor attracts special attention in the workplaces of cultural industries due to changes that take place in the highly competitive work environment every day. Globalization opens new markets, but at the same time, it creates insecurity and obliges cultural and creative industries to adopt modern, more intelligent and flexible systems of service rendering in order to obtain a competitive advantage. This is usually achieved when an organization takes seriously into consideration the rendering of services in accordance with the rules of aesthetics. It is also necessary that the values, that are dominant inside of cultural industries in relation to their organization culture, are adopted by their employees in order for them to contribute decisively to the creation of a competitive advantage in their workplaces.

2. Objectives of Work

“Aesthetics” means the science of sensation, of feeling. In this sense, it had its origin as a new science, or rather as something which for the first time was to become a philosophical discipline, in the school of Wolff at the period in Germany when works of art were treated with regard to the feelings they were supposed to produce, as, for instance, the feeling of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity and so on¹. The Greek verb “aisthanomai” means feeling through one’s senses, or sensing through physical sensory perception². In the 21st century, work environment has changed, and these changes illustrate the necessity of the «aesthetics» of employees. In this essay, questions were raised about the basic conditions of quality servicing. Furthermore, an attempt was made to approach executives concerning the Aesthetic Labor of organizations and enterprises in Athens, Greece and, through discussions with visitors to the museums and hotels under research, to record their opinion on employee work.

¹KNOX, T. (1975) 'INTRODUCTION', in KNOX, T. (ed.), HEGEL'S AESTHETICS: Lectures on Fine Art. 1st ed., Great Britain: Clarendon Press, p. 1.

² Kupers W. (2002) 'Phenomenology of Aesthetic Organizing—Ways towards Aesthetically Responsive Organizations', Consumption, Markets and Culture, 5 (1) p.22.

Museum prerequisites were also identified in relation to employees, e.g. the external characteristics that are interwoven with the aesthetic code that each museum establishes. This effort will not evaluate aesthetics as a «myth» or «reality», but it will try to prove that among the basic prerequisites of recruitment and employment in the museums and hotels under research, aesthetics plays a decisive role. For a more detailed presentation of the afore-mentioned subject, elements of relevant bibliography are hereby presented as well as data obtained through my personal observation and discussions with employees and visitors to the very big museums in Athens that are privately managed e.g. the «Museum of Cycladic Art» (100 employees), the «Benaki Museum» (180 employees) and the «Frysira Museum» (with fewer employees). For a complete picture of this research on aesthetics, views and data concerning two boutique hotels in Athens, the «Acropolis Museum Boutique Hotel» and the «Ava Boutique Hotel» are hereby presented, as well.

3. A Bibliographical Investigation of the Ideal Employee of Organizations and Enterprises

The unprecedented development of the service sector in the recent years has brought customer service in the limelight. Technical skills constitute only one dimension within the spectrum of qualifications possessed by an employee³, while the importance of employee attitude, behavior, and appearance has been stressed. Since the service employee is considered a part of the service provided, the “company style” should be manifested in every aspect of the process⁴. Hochschild introduced the concept of “emotional labour”, involving the expression of positive emotions when interacting with customers.⁵ In her own words, emotional labour means ‘the management of feeling to create publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value’⁶. Therefore, suppression of feelings is required in order to carry out the job.

Following this trend, Aesthetic Labour specifically addresses the embodied aspects of service interactions and has been defined as the employment of workers with desired corporeal dispositions...Aesthetic Labour does not just refer to beauty in general terms, even though it can and often does, but it also builds on processes of cultural matching through which workers are chosen to find brands in terms of gender, class and race.⁷ Work is viewed as a “performance” to the customer, demanding among others grooming, dress code, voice accent, and style⁸. In a similar vein, aesthetic labour is defined as “supply of 'embodied capacities and attributes' possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment”. Warhurst and Cullen (ibid) maintain that employers proceed on to commodify capacities and attributes through recruitment, selection and training in order to transform them into competencies and skills that are “aesthetically geared” (appealing to the senses of customers) in order to produce a particular ‘style’ of service encounter.⁹ For the recruitment of prospective employees, various methods of interviews are used, occasionally together with skills tests and psychomotor tests, e.g. for the measurement of hand skills, the coordination of hand and eye etc. Furthermore, personality tests may be used which investigate characteristics such as self-confidence, ambition, determination, optimism, patience, fear and distrust. The candidate’s evaluation is made according to company stereotypes, e.g. his/her appearance.¹⁰ The method of interview is an important parameter and can give important information about a prospective employee, e.g. the way he is dressed, namely his appearance, his voice tone, his verbal communication and body language.¹¹ All above illustrate how the positive profile of an employee is highlighted in order to satisfy the visitor-client, demonstrated by his appearance, e.g. body cleanliness as well as personal and dress style.

³ Actually technical skills were valued very low during selection, as revealed in a research among Glasgow employers (reported by Nickson et al. (2003) ‘Bringing in the Excluded? Aesthetic Labour, Skills, and Training in the New Economy’, *Journal of Education and Work*, 16 (2) p.190.

⁴ Warhurst C. & D. Nickson (2007) ‘Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality’, *Work, Employment & Society* 21 (1) pp. 103-120.

⁵ Hochschild A. (1983), *The Managed Heart. The Commercialization of Human Feeling*, University of California Press.

⁶ Hochschild A. (1983) *ibid*, p.7

⁷ Petersson McIntyre, M. (2014) ‘Commodifying Passion’, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 7(1), p. 82, doi: 10, 1080/17530350.2013.851029.

⁸ Pettinger L. (2005), ‘Gendered Work Meets Gendered Goods’, *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 12 (5), pp. 460-478.

⁹ Warhurst C., Nickson D., A. Witz & A.M. Cullen (2000) ‘Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work: Some Case Study Evidence from the ‘New’ Glasgow’, *The Service Industries Journal*, 20 (3) (July 2000), p. 4.

¹⁰ Charal. K. Kanellopoulos (1990), *Management, Efficient Organization*, International Publishing Edition, Athens, pp. 262-263.

¹¹ Xirotiri-Koufidou St., (2001) *Management of Human Resources*, published by Anikoula, Salonica, p. 147.

Moreover, attention is paid to the employee's overall appearance which should reflect a professional image and a positive attitude towards the visitor-client together with feelings of support and cooperation. Every employee, before he starts his work, should make a final check to his appearance, keeping always in mind that the first impression is very important to his contact with the visitor-client. Organizations and enterprises always require that employees should combine their personal traits and qualifications in the most constructive manner. This was also certified by Jan Karlsson (2012) who stated that the «aesthetic labor market» is segmented into types of models, constructed by combinations of gender, ethnicity, age and appearance'.¹² Other elements which distinguish the employee inside of an organization or enterprise are his level of education as well as his interests. Nationality is important, and is usually taken into consideration in the employee personal data file. Prejudice, which exists in relation to some nationalities, is common as well as sad, and should be eliminated. In a similar way, some religious groups impose different rules to their followers not only to the way of work but also to their life style.¹³

The control of employee behavior remains at the discretion of the employer. It is characteristic that in 49 out of the 50 USA states, employment is at-will; either party may terminate the relationship for «good reason, for bad reason, or for no reason at all». However, nowadays, employees read newspapers, periodicals & books, listen to radio and watch television, thus, they are informed and formulate attitudes, perceptions and possibilities of reaction in their work.¹⁴ All desirable aesthetic attributes are not usually mentioned in their job description due to the possibility of legal complications, but still form the most important criterion of selection. Employees have difficulties to prove to court that their rejection or dismissal is usually due to their non-conformity to the rules of aesthetics that the organization has imposed, and relevant court decisions are contradictory. For example, the court vindicated a Muslim fireman in Newark who sued his organization for prohibiting the wearing of a beard. Although the company advocated the fact that the application of a special breathing aid to a fireman is impaired by a beard, the court vindicated the applicant.¹⁵ On the contrary, the court dismissed claims of Afro-American women versus American Airlines. Female employees alleged that a grooming policy that prohibited the wearing of braided hair was discriminatory against women and, in particular, black women. The court determined that “[a]n all-braided hair style is an ‘easily changed characteristic,’ and, even if socio-culturally associated with a particular race or nationality, is not an impermissible basis for distinctions in the application of employment practices by an employer.”¹⁶

4. Identifying Aesthetics in Three Museums in Athens, Greece

4.1 The «Benaki Museum» is located opposite the Greek Parliament in the center of Athens, employing 180 people. The criteria for employee selection and recruitment consist of Aesthetic Labour rules that are identified as particular external attributes, e.g. people of young age are preferred, smiling and always cheerful. The positive, friendly, pleasant and tactful profile of an employee should always be in accordance with the Museum's rules. As far as dress code is concerned, strict specifications are non-existent, but the Museum pays a lot of attention to the uniforms of security personnel and cleaning staff. The requirements for the rest of the personnel is education, and as far as external characteristics are concerned, the Museum accepts combed and slightly dyed hair (anything excessive is rejected) as well as hands with clean nails without rings or bracelets. Small distinctive jewelry may be worn but nothing in excess. It should be noted that knowledge of languages is a very important qualification that the Museum's employees should possess.

4.2 At a very short distance from the previous museum, the «Museum of Cycladic Art» is located employing 100 people. In accordance with the Museum's rules, the employee image should be very well-tended, since his/her good appearance is an important qualification that affects visitors to a considerable degree. The employee should have a positive attitude, always smiling; he or she should be pleasant, friendly, and abide by the strict museum's rules. The employee should have clean nails, and should not wear rings, bracelets or necklaces.

¹²Karlsson, J. (2012) 'Looking Good and Sounding Right: Aesthetic Labour', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 33(1), p. 59. Available at: <http://eid.sagepub.com/content/33/1/51>

¹³Hytiris L. (2001) *Organizational Behavior*, published by Interbooks, Athens, p. 34. [ISBN: 960 – 390-088-5]

¹⁴ Hytiris L. (2006) *Management, Principles of Enterprise Administration*, published by Interbooks, Athens, p.246.

¹⁵ Pagliarini T. (2014) 'It can't get that ugly. Why employers should be able to take aesthetics into consideration', *Roger Williams University Law Review*, vol. 19, pp. 277-315.

¹⁶Pagliarini, T., id.

A special uniform is worn consisting of a light blue shirt, black trousers, a blue jacket and black shoes. Distinctive appearance is absolutely necessary. Furthermore, employees should possess adequate knowledge of History, Art and Aesthetics, certified by a University degree in Arts, History or Tradition. Definitely, knowledge of languages is a very important qualification.

4.3 The «Frysira Museum» is also located in the center of Athens, in the area of Plaka near the Acropolis. The Museum's Management considers appearance to be a catalytic factor for employees who should be presentable, decent, and discreet with well-tended appearances. Concerning uniforms, there is no rule, but uniformity in appearance is expected. Regarding skills, speed of service and knowledge of languages are considered very important.

4.4 The «Acropolis Museum Boutique Hotel» and «Ava Boutique Hotel»

Concerning these two hotels, my observations and data on the subject of aesthetics will be presented. Those particular hotels have established rules concerning employee appearance. All employees should be presentable, diligent, smiling, positive, friendly, and should abide by the strict aesthetic hotel rules. A uniform is absolutely necessary and consists of a white shirt, black trousers, a scarf around the neck (for women) and black shoes, whereas on higher floors, employees wear bright-colored uniforms and anatomical shoes in order to cope with work demands. As it is the case with museums, restrictions exist concerning hair, nails, jewelry, etc. Knowledge of languages is absolutely necessary, and executives should also possess a degree of higher education in Hotel Management.

5. Subjective Conclusions-Critical Thoughts

In relation to the subject of Aesthetic Labour concerning the three museums and the two boutique hotels that were visited for the preparation of this essay, the following conclusions were derived. The appearance of personnel in the workplace is of decisive importance. All organizations that were visited had particular requirements for their employees in relation to hand care, wearing of jewelry (or more accurately, the absence of jewelry), personal cleanliness and appearance in general. Even in organizations, where a uniform is not imposed, certain dress codes are existent. The external appearance of employees is inextricably interwoven with the "aesthetic code" that every museum or hotel imposes to people working in their premises. It should be made clear that these aesthetic rules are not always dictated by the whims and caprices of organization managers, but are derived from the desires of visitors-clients themselves. All visitors that were contacted during this research confirmed the fact that they preferred to interact with decent and presentable employees and stressed the necessity of a uniform that could differentiate visitors from employees in order to know whom to contact. Definitely, employee knowledge on subjects of history, archaeology, folkloric tradition etc. is considered absolutely necessary. Visitors stated that if a member of the personnel showed ignorance on a particular museum exhibit, their impression would be negative and disappointing.

Personnel behavior is also strictly controlled, and for this particular reason, employees have to attend special seminars on issues such as coping with complaints, handling of visitors-clients, etc. In the UK, such seminars have taken place since the 90s – decades before being introduced in Greece, e.g. one consultant lecturing for the British Shops and Stores Association suggested that 'arm folding, nose-scratching and slouching posture are all vital body language signs now being squashed'¹⁷ The employee should adopt a particular code and always be pleasant, discreet, affable and cooperative, positive and friendly, and of course, he/she should never express his/her personal feelings. A particular event that took place during this research was that one discussion with an employee working for one of the afore-mentioned boutique hotels was interrupted by his colleague that offered him his condolences on the death of a close relative. Although the employee was facing the loss of a beloved person, his behavior did not reveal anything. On the contrary, it is observed that in areas considered 'hot and trendy', employees of service rendering enterprises are dressed in expensive and exclusive uniforms, and, at the same time, they are impolite using the motto that, in this way, they express themselves as it was pointed out by Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson (2007).¹⁸

¹⁷ Lowe M. & L. Crewe (1996) 'Shop work: Image, Customer Care, and the Restructuring of Retail Employment', in Wrigley N. & M. Lowe (eds): Retailing, Consumption, and Capital. Harlow: Longman (reported by Warhurst C. et al (2000), *ibid*).

¹⁸ Warhurst, C. and Nickson, D. (2007) 'Anew Labour Aristocracy? Aesthetic Labour and Routine Interactive Service', *Work, Employment & Society*, 21(4), p. 788. Available at: <http://wes.sagepub.com/content/21/4/785>

In my opinion, the weak points of this behavior are the poorly understood «job descriptions» and «job specifications». Since those employees interact with people, their behavior should always be appropriate and decent.

6. Epilogue

The globalized market creates new perspectives, particularly in the sector of service rendering and notably in cultural industries which impose specific codes of personnel appearance and behaviour. To confirm this, Peter Waring stated that employers are seeking employees who both 'look and sound right' for their businesses.¹⁹ Nowadays, organizations are forced to study the personality traits of employees answering two questions: how similar people are, and how different we want them to be towards others even ostensibly. Focusing on this direction, cultural industries as well as enterprises in general attempt continuous improvements and renewal of their personnel in order to obtain a competitive advantage. This implies that employees are selected with particular attention in order to cope, using their knowledge and skills, with the demands of cultural and creative industries, a fact which has fueled disputes regarding discrimination in workplaces. In our societies, various different cultures coexist since every human group has its own. In view of this, cultural industries should not concentrate on the social exclusion of people that have different color, another religion and other social characteristics. Moreover, there is a great variety of ways of personal self-expression, irrespective of color, race, religion, etc. that are compatible with the demands of Aesthetic Labour. The encouragement of the multicultural dimension of personnel selection by cultural and creative industries contributes positively to their image, since a wider spectrum of visitors is attracted.

Cultural industries should pay respect to the dignity of their employees, and the work environment should understand their needs and problems. The environment of the workplace is a very important issue along with its physical atmosphere; both predispose all visitors-clients positively if they are well-structured in order to satisfy the organization's and their visitors-clients' needs. Nowadays, more and more organizations and enterprises understand the importance of Aesthetics, primarily in the service and hospitality sector. Aesthetic Labour complements personnel skills and knowledge, and it has been proven that it results in an improved company image, creating a competitive advantage in a highly competitive environment of today to the benefit of the company, its employees and society in general.

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¹⁹Waring, P. (2011) 'Keeping up Appearances: Aesthetic Labour and Discrimination Law', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 53(2), p. 196. Available at: <http://jir.sagepub.com/content/53/2/193>
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