Value-creation processes in artistic interventions and beyond: Engaging conflicting orders of worth

Anke Strauß

European University Viadrina, Große Scharrnstraße 59, 15230 Frankfurt (Oder), Germany

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The art world and the business organisation sphere considerably differ in their values, codes and practices. Researchers advocating artistic interventions in organisations often claim that tensions arising from these differences can add value in that they can be made productive for initiating overdue changes in organisations. The results of a qualitative meta-synthesis of evaluative studies on artistic interventions in organisations, however, show that whilst organisation actors value experiences with the art individually, very few report impacts on an organisational level. Asking how researchers search for values-added, this paper introduces Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) theory of different orders of worth to propose a shift from finding values-added to engaging with processes of value-creation. After demonstrating how researchers manage different orders of worth in evaluative studies by subsuming the inspirational world of art under an industrial order of worth, this paper introduces a different notion of evaluation that might support business organisation members to create value from the experiences made with the art on an organisational level. It concludes with discussing the implications involved in such a shift of perspective for both researchers and business organisational members.

1. Introduction

For over a decade management and organisation researchers and practitioners have been intrigued by the idea of bringing "people, products or practices from the world of the arts" into the world of organisations (Berthoin Antal, 2012, p. 45) to create value beyond PR initiatives. Subsumed under the notion artistic interventions in organisations (Berthoin Antal, 2009) but also addressed as arts-in-business (Darsø, 2004) or arts-based initiatives (Schiuma, 2011), such encounters are considered to initiate or facilitate individual and organisational learning and change as well as creativity and innovation (Biehl-Missal, 2011; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). For many, bringing the arts into the business sphere is considered to be an opportunity to profoundly change the way business practitioners think and do business (Adler, 2006).

Practices of artistic interventions have many faces. Engaging with various art forms and qualities - ranging from professionally produced art to more amateur creations – they are initiatives that can last hours, days or months. They can be part of a consulting contract, mediated by intermediaries (Berthoin Antal, 2012) or initiated by artists as part of an art project (Strauß, 2017).

In line with this wide range of practices, the growing body of literature is far from homogeneous. Writings on artistic interventions in organisations vary considerably with regard to their theoretical approach and empirical saturation (Johansson Sköldberg, Woodilla, & Berthoin Antal, 2016). Yet despite the differences, research on artistic interventions in organisation shows signs of maturing. Whilst in the beginning the majority of writings on the topic were busy promoting artistic interventions in organisations by presenting the *potential value* of bringing art into the organisation sphere (Adler, 2006; Darsø, 2004; Guillet de Monthoux, 2004), different stakeholders increasingly express a demand for *finding value* of such projects, leading to writings that engage with the question "what is the real value of artistic interventions in organizations?" (Darsø, 2015, p. 22).

This shift is also supported by the fact that artistic interventions in organisations are situated in a complex interplay of stakeholders located in different spheres, such as artists, business organisation members, researchers, consultants, as well as policy-makers. Often, artistic interventions are supported by policy-schemes on national as well as EU level (Berthoin Antal, 2011) and are therefore asked to demonstrate the results of such initiatives. Evaluating the effects of the arts on different areas – including the organisational sphere – becomes thus more and more the "key to legitimacy, status, recognition, and sometimes funding" (Dahler-Larsen, 2006, p. 147). Hence, in addition to empirical research generally engaging with this topic (Rae, 2011; Teichmann, 2001), one can find various reports that explicitly aim at evaluating the impacts of artistic interventions in organisations (e.g., Arts & Business, 2004; Barry & Meisiek, 2004; Berthoin Antal, 2009; Berthoin

Antal & Strauß, 2013a; Carlson, 2007; Heaney, 2004; Schiuma, 2009; Styhre & Eriksson, 2008).

In the context of an EU-funded research project, the author carried out a qualitative meta-study of these research-based publications (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2013a, 2016). The main aim of this analysis was finding documented empirical evidence of the impact of art on business organisations and developing categories of impact grounded in a broader set of studies.

For this, a meta-synthesis was carried out of already existing studies on the impact of the arts on the organisational sphere. An extensive literature search on art and business initiatives as well as the impact of the arts on non-art related contexts led to an initial database of 268 publications. Three further inclusion/exclusion criteria – arts impact on *organisations*, *empirically* grounded study and *method* made explicit - considerably reduced the original amount of literature to a set of 47 case studies. All publications included in the analysis are based on multiple case studies, so that the analysis comprised some 300 organisations of different sizes, in various countries and different sectors.

The meta-synthesis of studies of the impact of art on the organisation sphere distinguishes between different levels of organisational life on which artistic interventions can have an impact on the: a) personal level; b) inter-personal level and c) organisational level.

The analysis shows that the stakeholders involved identified personal development as the main value of artistic interventions in organisations with art being capable of tilting the perspective and initiating reflection as the most-often mentioned effect.

This emphasis on personal development alone has been critically addressed by one of the studies included in the meta-synthesis. It noted a decade ago that the over-emphasis on individual development encourages "the pigeonholing of arts-based work… [in that it] makes it difficult for the arts to break out of this narrow silo of activity" (Arts & Business, 2004, p.15).

Although this label has not lost its potency, the meta-study has shown that since then art has also been reported to have effects on the second, the interpersonal level, enhancing for instance relationships and fostering collaborative ways of working (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2016).

Hence, it seems that in the last ten years art managed to escape the silo of personal development schemes and increase its scope of influence on a much broader level.

At the same time, however, very few studies reported effects of artistic interventions on an organisational level. Close to none reported on new approaches for thinking, seeing and doing business and there was no evidence that artistic interventions have led to changes in an organisation's structure.

Meta-synthesis is primarily "an exploratory, inductive research design to synthesize primary qualitative case studies for the purpose of making contributions beyond those achieved in the original studies" (Hoon, 2013, p. 523). Aggregating primary studies to ground evidence of impacts of artistic interventions in organisations on a broader basis responds to demands of validity and to some extent generalizability. This, however, is just one goal of a meta-synthesis. It also aims at "building theory by refining or extending existing theory or by generating theory" (Hoon, 2013, p. 523). As the method and categories of evidence for values-added are comprehensively published elsewhere (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2013a, 2016) this paper takes the shift of reported impacts from the personal to the interpersonal level as a starting point to problematize the notion of value in the interplay between the organisational sphere and the world of art. Bringing the empirical study into dialogue with Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) theory of different orders of worth, aims at furthering the understanding of how experiences with the arts in the business organisation sphere can flow into the various levels of business organisational life.

This paper aims at sensitising the various stakeholders of artistic interventions in organisations for different moments of value creation from experiences made with art in the business organisation sphere, thereby supporting their ability of productively engage with the processes involved with it. It thus shifts away from a focus on outcomes to processes, asking *how* is value created from experiences with the arts in the organisation sphere?

2. Justifying art in the organisation sphere: managing different orders of worth

Management and organisation researchers promoting encounters between the art and the business organisation sphere argue that the world of art and that of business organisations employ differing values, codes and practices (Berthoin Antal, 2012). They consider tensions arising from these differences to be productive for initiating overdue changes in organisations (Adler, 2006; Berthoin Antal, 2013). The value of arts for business, so the often-used argument can be found in art's potential "to disrupt the dominant economic logic that permeates most organizations" (Johansson Sköldberg & Woodilla, 2016, p. 204).

Earlier writings on artistic interventions in organisations assumed that it is art's capacity of questioning the taken-for-granted that creates value in the organisational sphere (Nissley & Jusela, 2002; Seifter & Buswick, 2005; Schiuma, 2009). They implicitly suggested that an artistic intervention brings value into the organisation independently of the engagement of the organisation members.

This notion has been criticized by various scholars (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2014; Van Uden, 2015) who argue that value does not exist independently of the engagement of the participants in an artistic intervention.

Today, researchers emphasize that it needs active translation processes (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2014, 2016; Bozic Yams, 2016) that are carried out, for instance by mediators, because the "different logics easily lead to conflicts and misunderstanding" (Berthoin Antal, 2012; Grzelec, 2013; Johansson Sköldberg & Woodilla, 2016, p. 221).

Whilst this notion of value as a result of translation practices serves to open up the notion of value by shifting attention to the processes involved with creating it, it does not account for why values reported on a personal or inter-personal level are not mirrored to the same extent on the organisational level. The author suggests elsewhere that the lack of evidence of art's impact on organisations as a whole is closely related to the lack of follow-up activities that create value from artistic interventions (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2016).

This might be due to the fact that organisations rarely allocate time to reflect on the experiences made in an artistic intervention but expect value to be created mostly during the intervention. Also, organisation members also often do not know how to tie in with the experiences to transfer them into opportunities for valuating these experiences on an organisational level (Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2014).

Hence, it seems that the organisational environment offers little space or opportunities for experiences with artistic interventions to radically change every day organisational life. Quite the opposite as Bozic Yams (2016, p. 161) remarks on her experience with an artistic intervention: "I felt we were often limited by specific goals or the expectations that everything we did needed to be applicable in everyday work."

This paper suggests extending the notion of value-as-translation into value-as-negotiation of different order of worth to account for processes of co-creating values that are far more complex than the one-directional notion of translation might suggest. Additionally, it suggests, that researchers are relevant stakeholders to the phenomenon of artistic interventions in organisations in that their studies have an impact on the dispositional properties of the situation an artistic intervention in an organisation constitutes. For this, it introduces in the following Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) notion of different orders of worth to then examine how researchers manage these different orders of worth in their evaluative studies.