

Organizational Aesthetics and the Bottom Line: The Planetree Model of Health Care Delivery

William F. Martin, Psy.D., M..P.H., M.A.

martym@depaul.edu

DePaul University

College of Commerce

Department of Management

1 East Jackson Blvd.

Chicago, IL. 60604-2287

312.362.7254

312.362.6973

The purpose of this presentation is to share with conference participants the underlying conceptual framework and key empirical evidence related to the emerging field of organizational aesthetics and its application to the delivery of health care. In this presentation, Strati's (2000) conceptual model of organizational aesthetics is organized into five distinct categories: (1)organizational identity images; (2)physical space of the organization; (3)physical artifacts; (4)ideas like the beauty of social organization; and (5)lessons learned for management from artistic form and content. This presentation will focus upon the physical space of the organization, the beauty of social organization, and organizational aesthetics as an approach to organizational innovation and transformation.

This area of scholarship is classified as post-modern organizational theory. Post-modern organizational theory offers explanations and predictions about the complexity of organizations that go beyond instrumental questions of efficiency and effectiveness. This emerging line of inquiry investigates questions related to aesthetics. According to Taylor and Hansen (2005), aesthetics "is concerned with knowledge that is created from our sensory experiences. It also includes how our thoughts and feelings and reasoning around them inform our cognitions (page 1212)." In short, aesthetics can be used as a variable to be employed as a measure to establish criteria for judgment. For instance, it has been stated by observers of an efficient process that "it's working beautifully."

A useful theoretical application of organizational aesthetics is the Planetree Model of healthcare. The Planetree Model of health care delivery was founded in 1978 by a patient and has now expanded globally as a more innovative model of health care. In fact, this model of health care was developed as a tool of organizational transformation based upon the ten components of the model. In 1985, the first Planetree concept facility, a 13-bed medical/surgical unit in a large California medical center was created. Since then, the Planetree organization has grown to more than 50 affiliated healthcare facilities in the acute-care, outpatient and long-term care environments.

The ten components of the Planetree Model are as follows: (1)human interactions; (2)the importance of family, friends, and social support; (3)empowering patients through information and education; (4)architectural design conducive to health and healing; (5)the importance of the nutritional and nurturing aspects of food; (6)healing arts: nutrition for the soul; (7)spirituality: the importance of inner resources; (8)the importance of human touch; (9)complementary therapies: expanding patient choices; and (10)healthy communities: expanding the boundaries of healthcare. Planetree is very similar to quality management paradigms. Both Planetree and TQM/CQI have goals of improving the delivery of patient care, and there are times when these approaches work in concert.

To date, empirical evidence comparing 12 Planetree affiliates 12 months prior to and 12 to 24 months following implementation of the Planetree model of care, found significant average increases in overall patient satisfaction, and willingness to recommend the health care organization to others. The Planetree model of care also has been associated with fewer medical errors and lower nosocomial infection rates. Additionally, other studies have found an empirical relationship between the Planetree model and reduced turnover.

This presentation has been designed to appeal to those participants who seek to understand more about the relationship between business ethics and aesthetics and to those who have an interest in health care delivery, organizational transformation, and human resources management. This presentation may be of benefit to those academicians and practitioners who wish to design research studies utilizing organizational aesthetics as a theory to be tested and advanced with increasing empirical evidence. The Planetree Model of health care offers as an example one way to test organizational aesthetics as a theory.

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1. Strati, A. (2000). "The aesthetic approach to organization studies." In Hopfl, H. (Ed.), *The Aesthetics of Organization*. London: Sage, 13-34.
 2. Taylor, S.S. & Hansen, H. (2005). Finding form: Looking at the field of organizational aesthetics. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(6), 1211-1231.