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The role of design

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an emotional
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*between
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BLURRING BOUNDARIES

THE ROLE OF DESIGN IN FOSTERING AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION BETWEEN EMPLOYEE & WORKPLACE

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DONALD A. NORMAN

Is a cognitive scientist and cofounder of the Nielsen Norman Group, an executive consulting firm that helps companies produce human-centered products and services. Among other books, he is the author of *Emotional Design - Why we love (or hate) everyday things*. (2004)



(Norman, 2003)

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ABSTRACT

This literary research thesis aims to give insight to individuals interested in the effect design has on an employees emotional connection with the company in which they are hired. With the controversial viewpoint that companies are experiencing the full effects of a globalized, societal transformation and the gained understanding that there is an increased importance on the relationship an employee expects from their employer, I dug deeper to understand how companies are responding using the power of design.

As a framework, I compare Norman's Theory of emotional design (2004, Product Design) against internal branding norms to bring out ideas and practices which correlate. I strengthen this through drawing upon literary knowledge, innovative case studies from existing companies and, when applicable, short interviews with industry professionals. I conclude by presenting that Normans Theory, although never compared to internal branding practices, brings to light multiple emotional design touchpoints that a company can better harness to positively influence an employee's emotional connection to their workplace.

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**"THE FOCUS IS NOT ON
PRODUCTS, BUT ON THE
CONSUMERS' VALUE
CREATING PROCESSES, WHERE
VALUE EMERGES FOR CONSUMERS,
AND IS PERCEIVED BY THEM...
THE FOCUS OF MARKETING IS
VALUE CREATION RATHER THAN
VALUE DISTRIBUTION."**

CHRISTIAN GRONROOS, 2000

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, the notion of engaging employees with company vision and values has become increasingly crucial for the success of a business. The evolution of ideas surrounding the concept of service-dominant logic, which advocates that everything is a service has put a new-found attention on how brands can create memorable experiences for both customers and stakeholders (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Grönroos, 2012). Furthermore, the changing landscape of attracting and retaining talent has demanded that companies get creative to emotionally connect with their employees if they are going to appeal to, and in the end keep the best individuals (Ind, 2017). The progression of the 1997 term 'The War for Talent,' coined by McKinsey, has caused considerable debate among researchers and human resource professionals resulting in varying opinions on what the future of the workforce will look like (Keller, 2017). Changing demographics, globalization and the evolution of brand are discussed as a preface to understanding the need for engaging employees with company vision and values. Ind (2017) states that "The neat linear pattern of an organization creating a brand and then generating feedback through market research has been replaced by something far messier and more polyphonic" (Ind, 2017; p. 4).

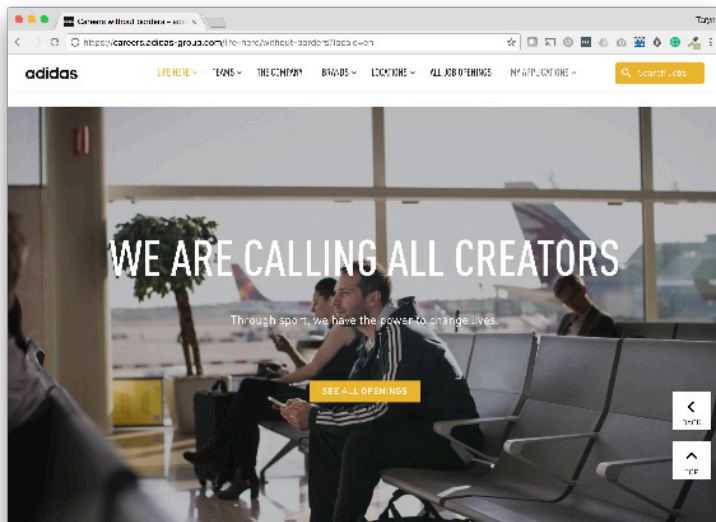
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For centuries design has been used as a way to evoke emotion, creating a connection between customers and a product or service. It has only been in the past 20 years that companies have started to harness the power of design to persuade employees of the brand's power (Mitchell, 2014). Leemon (2017) reinforces this, explaining that companies are "realizing the emotions of stakeholders are important but fail to figure out a consistent way to define them, connect them and link them to results."

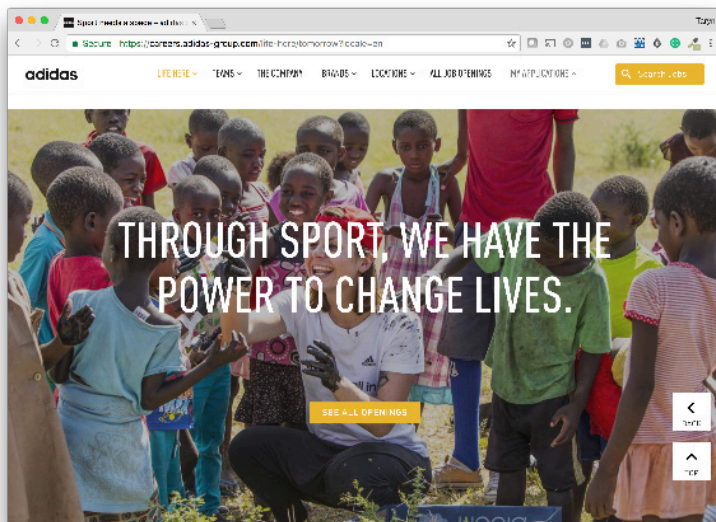
Although a world class brand in 2007, Adidas Inc was struggling to attract and retain talent. As a result, they launched a campaign, intersecting authentic storytelling and visual design elements. In response to the launch, Adidas Inc. reported roughly 8 million visitors to their career site that year – an increase of almost double (Minchington, 2016). Researchers and industry professionals caught on quickly, and through consideration, the question of whether or not an employee’s emotional connection to their workplace is influenced through design began to surface. This is the center of what this study will address. *Blurring Boundaries – The Role of Design in Fostering an Emotional Connection Between an Employee and their Workplace* begins, at its base with Norman’s research theory (2004). Norman argues that successful design excels in three levels of emotional design – visceral level (appearance and pleasure during first interaction), behavioral level (usability and performance), and reflective level (the meaning, self-image, and message). While Norman’s research is highly respected in the product development field, it has yet to be studied as a potential base to form improved internal branding practices further connecting employees to the company brand.

Before addressing further, the correlation of Norman’s theory with internal brand it is essential to identify the fundamental shifts in both, the world of branding and the workforce landscape, which have shaped the way one perceives the emotional relationship between workplace and employee.

Figure 1.1
Adidas’ current career page
embraces storytelling



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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The first part of this theoretical framework intends to create a foundation for the study by exploring the controversial topic surrounding the term 'The War for Talent'. The second part investigates the conceptual meaning of brand and its strategic significance. Lastly, to understand the changing role in the relationship between employee and workplace this theoretical framework will address the factors companies consider to create a stronger emotional connection with employees.

2.1

THE 'WAR FOR TALENT' AND ITS PUSH FOR INTERNAL BRAND FOCUS

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In 1997, McKinsey commenced a year-long study addressing the changing landscape of the employee relationship to company success and coined the term 'The War for Talent.' The phrase depicted a globalizing economy in which people increasingly changed jobs, where start-ups of the dot.com boom offered new opportunity and where intellectual capital was becoming a vital source of competitive advantage. In this new war, there was a switch in favor of the sought-after employee, one that could now dictate their own terms instead of being bound to corporate norms (Ind. 2017).

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS & GLOBALIZATION

The face of the workforce is to change dramatically over the next decade concerning numbers and ages of employees. Today, millennials are already the most significant demographic, exceeding baby boomers in 2016. By 2020, millennials are expected to constitute more than 50% of the workforce, and 75% by 2025 (Dews, 2016) Therefore, the

change in demographics brings new beliefs, mindsets, assumptions, and ways of working. Still, "our organizations have always had to adapt to new generations entering the workforce, but the overall sense is that previous adaptations were very slow and gradual and have now become more aggressive" (Morgan, 2017).

Along with changing demographics, a globalizing economy has made switching jobs easier to do than ever before. There is now little, if any, stigma associated with it – thanks to the transparency offered by online communities and the increase in access to online recruitment agencies (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams, 2004). Throughout history, companies have competed on credentials and seniority, location and direct competition. This competition meant that if an individual lived in Berlin, they would compete against other people in their area, or that if an individual worked for Ford, they might be poached by recruiters from their industry competitor, Toyota. Changing demographics and globalization have seemed to change this; employees have entered into a globalized economy where everyone is competing against everyone (Morgan, 2017).

In January 2016, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the average person changes their job 10 - 15 times – with an average of 12 job changes – during his or her career (Employee Tenure Summary, 2016). LinkedIn also reinforces this stating that over the last 20 years, the number of companies an individual worked for in the five years after they graduated has nearly doubled (Berger, 2016). The war for talent isn't just about attracting potential employees but also keeping existing ones.

SKILLS GAP AND TALENT SHORTAGE

McKinsey stated that “by 2020, the world could have 40 million too few postsecondary-educated workers, and developing economies could have a shortage of 45 million workers with secondary-school educations and vocational training. In more advanced countries, as many as 95 million workers could lack the skills needed for employment” (Morgan, 2017). The employment statistics, however, paint an alternative picture. As of April 2017, 1.6 million Americans have found themselves unemployed for at least six months consecutively, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost a million people have been without a job for over a year (Bahler, 2017). Throughout the Great Recession, the statistics in the United States were worse: the numbers indicated that ‘The War for Talent’ had turned into ‘The War for Jobs.’ In economies gripped by financial crises, unemployment hit levels not seen since the early 1980s, so there was no shortage of applicants for many openings. When Walmart launched a new Washington, DC, store in 2013, for example, it received 23,000 applications for 600 positions” (Keller, 2017). One of the most discussed argumentations is the notion that millions of jobs go unfilled because of a discrepancy between the skills employers want and those that applicants possess. Not everyone agrees that such a gap exists, and there’s a range of opinions about how to fix it among those who do (Morgan, 2017). Irrespective of this realization, one cannot disregard that companies are experiencing the full effects of a societal transformation, which has placed new importance on the relationship between employee and the company in which they are hired.

While McKinsey predicted that ‘The War for Talent’ would only last until 2020 companies continue to see an uprise in the expectation of the developmental, financial, and psychological remuneration an

employee expects to receive from their workplace. The most recent ManpowerGroup Talent Shortage Survey found that 38% of employers are having difficulty filling jobs (Morgan, 2017). Everything suggests that the 'War for Talent' will continue. "Failure to attract and retain top talent" was the number-one issue in the Conference Board's 2016 survey of global CEOs (Keller, & Meaney, n.d.). In response to the talent gap and rising competitiveness, organizations have begun to take seriously the importance of employee experiences. Organizations that focus on creating positive connections have reported that they are not feeling the effects of the skills gap as much as those who choose otherwise (Morgan, 2017).

2.2

THE CONCEPTUAL MEANING OF 'BRAND' AND ITS STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

Irrespective of whether or not one agrees that attracting and retaining talent will continue to be an uphill battle, companies are increasingly exploring creative ways in which they can keep their talented employees. To better understand the subsequent effects of 'The War for Talent' and the blurring of boundaries between inside and outside an organization, one must first understand the recent expansion surrounding the concept of branding.

Branding in itself is an extensive concept, and its literature is mostly found to be focused on external branding (De Chernatony, 2001). Within academic and design circles the term brand has often been misused and falsely understood. In its traditional definition, brand has been defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group

of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1991; p. 442) Furthermore, a brand is defined as physical expression of a promise - a collection of functional and emotional attributes that offer a individual brand experience to the consumers (De Chernatony, 2001). However, over the past quarter-century, many argue that companies have just started to understand and leverage the true power of branding. Researchers suggest that branding in its larger parts is more psychological and led by human behavior which has a high propensity to change (Leemon, S. M., Schulman, A., Arons, M. D., Driest, F. V., Weed, K., & Rayport, J. F, 2017). This realization led to the concept of Emotional Branding, which was defined in 2001, citing a possible connection on an emotional level in a consumer-brand relationship. It was the first time awareness was brought forward recognizing that “emotional identity is not only a result of ads and products by also corporate policy and stances” (Gobé, 2001; p.64). Even before Emotional Branding, the complexity of the term ‘brand’ was increasing.

One concept introduced alongside ‘The War for Talent’ was the term “employer branding.” Employer branding argues that it is imperative that an organization specifically think about its offer to employees if they want to successfully compete for the most talented individuals (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). Employer branding is evidenced in the quality of reputation a company has in a job market as an employer. For example Glassdoor, one of the fastest-growing jobs sites, holds a growing database of over 11 million company reviews for a half million companies. With 30 million unique visitors monthly one cannot ignore that a large segment of potential employees are investigating potential careers before making a final decision to accept a job offer (Adams, 2016). Parallel to employee branding, the notion that a company needs to market themselves internally has significantly increased.

"A company has, for decades marketed themselves externally with little or no focus on employees, the very people who can make the brand come alive for customers. While executives admit the need to keep employees informed about the company's roadmap and strategic decisions, few admit the need to persuade employees of the brands power" (Mitchell, 2014). Ind (2017) acknowledges this rising trend and introduced the term "Integrated Branding"—the idea of unifying brand building around external communications and internal behavior. While widely debated which "brand" holds utmost importance, it is agreed that the blurring of boundaries between the External Brand, Internal Brand, and Employer Brand is becoming significantly more difficult to decipher.

2.3

THE CHANGING ROLE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE AND WORKPLACE

With the mounting attention towards employee experience, researchers have increasingly taken an interest in the relationship between an employee and their workplace. Similar to the emotional connection to products, psychological and sociological employee experiences shape the employee connection. Companies are now, more than ever, taking these experiences more seriously as they try to authentically create environments where people want to get up in the morning and come to work (Morgan, 2017).

"This (employee experience) is no longer just a challenge that an organization can overcome with perks, higher pay, or gimmicks. Instead, the business world is turning to social scientists to really help them understand why and how people tick. It should come as no surprise that industrial organizational psychology is one of the fastest growing

professions. These scientists are influencing how we hire and recruit people, design our office spaces, lead and manage, and even build and run our HR departments.” (Morgan, 2017).

With the knowledge that during the last 20 years there has been a switch in favor of the sought-after employee, along with the parallel changes in how branding is understood, one can begin to move further and gain understanding into how companies connect with their internal stakeholders. This process is called Internal Branding. A brand incorporates what an organization stands for and, therefore needs to be communicated inwardly and positioned to benefit expectations (Simoes & Dibb, 2001). While research has shown a strong movement towards the better understanding of brand and the importance of employees ‘living out the brand promise’ (Ind, 2017), little has been discussed from a design standpoint. To ensure the connection between internal stakeholders and corporation informs the way individuals approach their roles and that the company brand continues to underpin each decision an employee executes, an understanding of human emotion and subsequent internal brand strategy must be established.

Through further analysis and discussion, this thesis will present a glimpse into internal branding practices drawn from the existing literary research of Don Norman. His extensive study on the connection



between human emotion and product design serve as a solid base to better understand what the role of design is concerning an employee's emotional attachment to their workplace.

Figure 1.2

Google tops the list of the "50 best companies to work for" and "the company with the best corporate culture" in 2017



3. METHODOLOGY & TERMS

This literary study will, at its base, compare Norman's Theory of emotional design (2004, Product Design) against internal branding practices to bring out ideas and practices which correlate. To strengthen this argument, this thesis will draw upon literary knowledge and innovative case studies from existing companies.



VISCERAL

**INTERNAL DESIGN EVOKING
AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE**



BEHAVIORAL

**INTERNAL DESIGN FULFILLING
EXTERNAL EXPECTATIONS**



REFLECTIVE

**INTERNAL DESIGN CREATING
A LASTING IMPRESSION**

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION





4.1

VISCERAL DESIGN

INTERNAL DESIGN EVOKING AN IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The vast majority of people recognize that first impressions are critical. We are unlikely to admit that we judge a book by its cover or a person by the clothing they are wearing or how they appear, but the reality is that we usually do. It's second nature. For centuries people have subconsciously made quick judgments, forming an opinion about a person, place or service long before any deeper involvement occurs. Studies have shown that it takes only 1/10th of a second to develop a first impression of an individual with many people believing that these snap judgments gradually dissipate over time, being replaced by new assessments (Laja, James, Yardney, 2017). However, experts have discovered that new experiences that contradict the first impression become tied to the context in which they were created, whereas first impressions still prevail in other contexts. According to Gawronski, our brain stores experiences that are counter to our initial impressions as exceptions-to-the-rule. The first impression is treated as valid

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Figure 4.1

Airbnb, Dublin, Ireland - Each meeting room has been inspired by listings from around the world and the likes of Portugal, Greece, Romania, Japan, Sweden, Morocco and France have been referenced in the spacial design (Banks, 2017).

except for the specific context or situation in which it has been proven inconsistent (Gawronski, 2010). Imagine looking at a photograph of an individual and your first, subconscious, impression is unfavorable. A few weeks later you are introduced to this individual at a social gathering, and you realize that they are surprisingly intelligent and humorous. Although you accept that your initial impression was incorrect, your internal response to this individual will be influenced by your current encounter only in contexts that are similar. However, your first impression will still dominate in all other contexts.

Moreover, first impressions are not just based on human interactions but also on visual aesthetic. Research shows that it takes approximately 50 milliseconds for visitors to form an opinion about a website, ultimately determining whether they like the site or not, whether they'll stay or leave (Laja, James, Yardney, 2017).

When referring to Norman's Theory of Emotional Design, Visceral Level Design is the perceived, initial qualities of an object and how this object makes the observer feel. For example, Norman describes how a grandfather clock offers no more features or time-telling functions than a small, featureless bedside clock, but the visceral (ingrained, unconscious, subjective, and involuntary feelings) qualities distinguish the two in the eyes of the owner. Norman (2004; p.51) states "It is where style matters: appearances, whether sound or sight, touch or smell, (that) drive the visceral response."... "It has nothing to do with how usable, effective or understandable a product is. It is purely about attraction or repulsion."

TRANSLATING COMPANY VALUES INTO CREATIVE SPATIAL EXPERIENCES

By taking Norman's widely accepted emotional design theory, one can create a connection to how individuals subconsciously judge visual aesthetic in alternative situations. For example, when applying it to spatial environments, an individual will viscerally make quick judgments about the environment: good or bad, safe or dangerous. These judgments can, primarily, be controlled through the design of the space in which an individual finds themselves (Norman, 2004) (Searer, 2015).

Going further and linking Normans theory to internal branding one can draw upon the understanding that our initial visceral experience will have a lasting impression irrespective of whether or not a new experience is made. Therefore, it is imperative that a company harness the power of these first milliseconds and do everything in their power to create a positive visceral response for potential employees.

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Through an in-house interview, office design is often one of the first internal interactions with a potential employee. This interaction with a company space will result in a visceral reaction and therefore, an opportunity to create a positive impression. The impact of an organization's physical space has been cited as "right up there with compensation in attracting and retaining great staff. Reception is where that journey/perception begins" (Searer, 2015). Companies such as Airbnb, Tumblr, and Shopify have already caught on to the value of visceral response through spatial design.

Airbnb, an American company which operates an online marketplace for people to lease or rent short-term lodging, has set the bar on translating their core values into creative spatial experiences. It has

been described that when you enter through the Airbnb office doors in SOMA, San Francisco, you could be arriving at “a trendy inner-city apartment building almost any place in the world,” (Clune, n.d.). which consciously aligns with the company’s mission: to create a world where you can belong anywhere. “Looking out across the atrium-like foyer, you peer into a kaleidoscope of colorful rooms that have been painstakingly built to resemble some of the more interesting Airbnb homes from around the world, including the founder’s apartment where the company started, all marked proudly with a plaque telling the story of the actual host and home” (Clune, n.d.). This quote, in turn, shows that Airbnb has understood the power of visceral response and its effect on employees. By investing in first impressions Airbnb follows Norman’s theory reinforcing that the subconscious, initial qualities of an object will positively or negatively shape a buyer’s decision.

Shopify, an eCommerce platform that allows merchants to design, develop, market, and sell goods to consumers around the world, capitalizes on the often overlooked 5 minutes where a potential employee is waiting for an interview. In Shopify’s Toronto office, future employees sit in a waiting area which showcases unique Shopify branded products from some of their most renowned partners (Figure 4.2).

This initial, visceral experience is a memorable introduction because it shows the positive working relationship between Shopify and its partners and goes further by creatively showing this partnership visually. By glancing at custom, Shopify Nike running shoes Shopify creates credibility and trust and a potential employee, in turn, realizes the success and expansion of this young startup (Waters, 2018).



Figure 4.2 Shopify "storefront" reception desk area, Toronto, Canada (Shopify, 2015)

THE VALUE OF VISCERAL DESIGN IN SETTING EXPECTATIONS

The design of office space is just one medium where visual design impacts an employees visceral response to their workplace. 22% of staff turnover is estimated to happen within the first 45 days in a new company. New hires disclose that lack of organization, clarity about their role and perceived value to the company are just a few of the reason for leaving (Son, 2017). With the emergence of these findings, companies have begun capitalizing on ways they can create impressionable first interactions, earlier. N26 GmbH, a fast-moving Berlin-based Financial Technology startup, is one company that has successfully done this. They have realized that the quicker you shape a new employees mindset and connect them to company brand the stronger the emotional connection will last. N26 GmbH has grown its employee base from 80 people to over 400 in a short two years (Plugers, personal communication, 2018). With a focus on not only hiring the

right talent, but retaining this talent, N26 GmbH continues to look for new ways to engage its soon-to-be employees. One of the ways they have tangibly carried this out is by sending a welcome package containing company branded merchandise, a handwritten postcard and an outline of what to expect on your upcoming, first day. By sending out a custom designed box to a new employee's home, the company is tangibly expressing the value of its new employee before they even set foot in the establishment (Plugers, personal communication, 2018). This visceral experience is paramount to creating a positive mindset that will act as a base for a successful onboarding experience. Searer (2015) sums up the reasoning for this nicely, stating that a company should "never give a new employee a reason to doubt their value to the company. Show all of your employees that you appreciate them and you may find an increase in employee retention".

Although a significant amount human behavior is a result of subconscious processes, and many scientists consider a visceral response only a precursor to emotion, it is imperative that a company engages the visceral level of design (Norman, 2004). By creating engaging, visceral experiences, a corporation can create a tangible representation of company values, (such as in the case of Shopify and Airbnb). Furthermore, they can create a physical experience that places value on employees (such as in the case of N26 GmbH) and ultimately, initiate a positive journey to the subsequent emotional levels of design as referenced in Norman's Theory.

"NEVER GIVE A NEW
EMPLOYEE A REASON
TO DOUBT THEIR VALUE
TO THE COMPANY.
SHOW ALL OF
YOUR EMPLOYEES
THAT YOU
APPRECIATE THEM
AND YOU MAY FIND AN
INCREASE IN EMPLOYEE
RETENTION."

SEARER 2015



Figure 4.3 - Patagonia Work Culture

4.2

BEHAVIORAL DESIGN

INTERNAL DESIGN FULFILLING EXTERNAL EXPECTATION

THE FUNCTIONALITY OF BEHAVIORAL DESIGN

The visceral level of design is the introduction, leading you to the inner workings of a product or service. What the visceral level promises should always be carried over to a behavioral level (Reimann, 2005). Behavioral level design is about functionality. It is interested in, for example, how individuals carry out their actions, how quickly and accurately they can achieve their aims and objectives (Reimann, 2005). What matters are the four major components that make up behavioral design: function, understandability, usability and physical feel (Norman, 2004). Norman places function as first importance because it speaks to what a product does, how well it performs and ultimately if it does anything of

interest. After functionality comes understanding - if an individual can't understand a product they are unable to use it to its full potential. The only way to accurately validate if a design is understandable is through early prototyping, iteration, and well set up feedback loops. (Norman, 2004). Thirdly the complex topic of usability comes into play. A product that does what is mandatory, and is understandable, may still not be usable. For example, a plane may do the assigned task well (to get an individual from point A to B), but while the airplane concept is quite simple to understand it can be difficult to use. Pilots spend years of training to understand the complexity and master the usability of an aircraft. The relative usability is something, in this case, we accept. Lastly, Norman argues that physical feel is imperative to good design. The initial visceral level design is centered around the physical aesthetic of product experience, and the same can carry through to behavioral level design. "Physical feel matters. We are, after all, biological creatures, with physical bodies, arms, and legs. A huge amount of the brain is taken up by the sensory systems, continually probing and interacting with the environment" (Norman, 2004; p. 78).

When examining this level of design in parallel to internal branding practices, it became clear that one must dig deeper to determine practical learnings. Reimann (2005) brings Norman's sub-components of behavioral level design together stating that "Designing for the behavioral level means designing product behaviors that complement a user's unspoken assumptions, and mental models." This statement brings to light a secure connection between a user's unspoken assumptions of a product and their implicit assumptions of an experience.

Every new and existing employee will have assumptions about what is expected from the company in which they work. Behavioral level

design concerning internal branding, then, highlights the importance of understanding these assumptions and then fulfilling or managing them. Just as the attention to the behavioral level design of a product affects the psychological connection between a product and individual the same can be said for internal brand behavioral design, which in turn aims to create a stronger connection to the company. According to a survey by the Novations Group, 48% of companies surveyed said the top reason new people quit is unrealistic expectations of the job. The fault can lie either with the employer, for misleading the employee, or with candidates, for assuming that a company will fulfill growing expectations (HR Morning, 2008). Dukes (2017) argues that “the push for instant gratification and a consumer-centric marketplace now means people tend to have unrealistic expectations in many areas of their lives—including at the office.” Irrespective of this realization, an employer can not ignore the fact that skilled employees are hard to find and even harder to retain (Ind. 2017). In response, many organizations are creatively experimenting with recruiting and retaining strong talent. Amazon recently announced they’re testing a 30-hour workweek. Airbnb gives employees a \$2,000 stipend annually to travel, and Netflix recently began offering one year of parental leave to both salaried and hourly employees (Stahl, 2016).

Design has long played a role in the management of expectations. A visceral design of a product or service can lead a potential buyer to agree to the purchase, but ultimately the behavioral level will determine if the investment was worth it. To reiterate, “What is promised on a visceral level should always be carried over to a behavioral level” (Reimann, 2005). For example, a company that broadcasts impressive interior branding in the interview area must manage the expectations that have been subconsciously created and carry this further through the office space.

ALIGNING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BRAND COMMUNICATION

Behavioral level design is not only exercised through visual design but the communication and advertising of internal vs. external company values. It is imperative that existing and potential employees hear the same message internally that their company is sending out to the marketplace. At most companies, however, internal and external communications are often not aligned. This misalignment can be very confusing, and in turn threatens employees' perceptions of the corporations' integrity: "An employee may experience an alternative reality in the day to day interactions with their company while observing that a different message is being sent to the public" (Mitchell, 2014). An extreme example of this is Zara Clothing retailer, who in November 2017, found themselves embroiled in controversy. "According to customers in Istanbul, cries for help in the form of handwritten notes from employees were found in the pockets of in-store garments asking shoppers to back their campaign for better labor standards and pressure Zara into paying them the wages they say they are owed" (Young, 2017). Externally, Zara presents itself as an organization that guarantees that its "entire production chain respects workers' labor conditions, product safety levels, and the environment". Going further, their corporate website states that Zara works "with a system to know where and how all products have been cut, dyed, washed and manufactured" (Zara, 2017).

Another example of how misaligned branding affects employees is Lush, a cosmetic soap brand that has obtained an almost cult-like status (Läsker, 2010). The company advertises externally by promoting that they do not tolerate animal testing for cosmetics and use strictly raw materials from organic farming. These external stances attract employees who are looking to work for a company creating products that change communities. In 2010, Lush, Germany came under fire for

the misalignment between external promises and internal realities. “For as much as the owners said they cared about animals and customers, they seemed to care less about their employees. I was just scared,” says a young employee, “afraid to lose the job if I do not sell enough” (Läsker, 2010).

On a more positive side of the spectrum, by taking employees into account, a company can avoid creating a message that doesn’t resonate with staff. Instead, a company can free employees to participate and define the company brand in an individual and unique way (Ind, 2017). Patagonia, an American outdoor clothing company is driven by the mission to “Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm and use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis” (Patagonia, 2017). They boast a staff of over 1000 employees and have been hailed as a lead example of a company that enables their employees to “live the brand” (Ind, 2017) Their careers page features photos of staff taking part in hobbies they love with quotes that reinforce the external brand commitment to the internal realities. (Figure 4.4) The same can be seen in their choice of copy which reinforces culture and sets expectations for future employees.

“We seek core Patagonia product users, people who love to spend as much time as possible in the mountains or the wild. We are, after all, an outdoor company. We would not staff our trade show booth with a bunch of out-of-shape guys wearing white shirts, ties, and suspenders any more than a doctor would let his receptionist smoke in the office. We can hardly continue to make the best outdoor clothing if we become primarily an “indoor” culture. So we seek out “dirtbags” who feel more at home in a base camp or on the river than they do in the office” (Chouinard, 2016).



Figure 4.4

"Two of the philosophies that ground Patagonia are "not be bound by convention" and "live an examined life." Since I started working here, these two ideas have independently redirected parts of my psyche and lifestyle, and recently have become two of the core ideals that frame, what I think, is a full life."

Paul Hendriks
Environmental Responsibility
Manager

Behavioral level design plays a significant role in fulfilling expectations that are set by external messaging. At Patagonia, brand-related symbols can be observed throughout their internal space. The 28-page internal branding book, *Defining Quality*, characterizes the company's understanding of quality and in return offers definitive norms. The fact that visitors are asked to serve themselves in the staff canteen is an added sign of integrity and transparency. Furthermore, employees are encouraged to leave work and head for the beach when the waves are ideal for surfing. To make the decision to surf easier the surf report is visible in the entrance hall of Patagonia's central office in Ventura, showing how deeply connected the company is with its customer base and historical origin (Ind, 2017).

At Nike, senior executives are instructed to deliberately avoid stories of financial successes and focus instead, on examples of "just doing it," echoing and internally reinforcing the company's external ad campaigns. One example of this, is the legendary coach and Nike co-

founder Bill Bowerman: in an exercise to create a better shoe for his team, he poured rubber into his family waffle iron, resulting in the first prototype of Nike's famous Waffle Sole. By verbalizing and celebrating such inventive moves, the company aims to keep the spirit of innovation that characterizes its ad campaigns alive and at the forefront within the company (Mitchell, 2014).

If Patagonia or Nike failed to manage the internal expectation that was set in place by external marketing the integrity and transparency concerning the core values would be in question. In that case, if Patagonia markets themselves as an organization that empathizes with its outdoor-oriented customer base it would be contradictory to enforce their employees to work long hours in a high-rise city center. The promise to align internal and external marketing is core to who Patagonia is and it is evidenced by quotes such as that from a previous employee: "I had the best 7 years of my career working here. Company walks the walk and talks the talk" (Glassdoor, 2018). Individuals take positions within companies with expectations about who that company is. If these expectations are found to be contrary to reality the individual is left feeling disappointed or worse of all deceived. On the other side of the spectrum a potential employee must also be conscious of a potential gap between external marketing and internal realities. By digging deeper and reading online reviews one is able to unravel the exact authentic characteristics of the company in which they are being pursued or currently work.

A company's choice to not only fulfill the visceral level assumptions but improve on these assumptions and create an environment that embodies the "whole experience" can be seen as an expansion to Norman's theory of Behavioral level product design. It is less about

the immediate functionality of a physical product but instead about how a company enables employees to interact with the values and expectations that were established at a visceral level. Having values up front attracts individuals to the organization, but it's not about just saying it, it's about presenting the tangible evidence to support it.

Figure 4.5 - Airbnb Work Culture



4.3

REFLECTIVE DESIGN

INTERNAL DESIGN CREATING A BETTER SELF

THE POWER OF REFLECTIVE DESIGN

Reflective design is the third, and final level of emotional design introduced by Norman. At a reflective design level "It is all about message, about culture, and about the meaning of a product or its use" (Norman, 2004; p 83). In this level, there is an experience beyond the initial moment when using a product. It's the lingering component of association and familiarity. Whether we admit it or not, we all worry about the image we present to others - or the image we present to ourselves. We choose clothing, products, and food based on our perception of who we are. Norman best explains the value of a reflective level product by comparing the design of two watches. Figure 4.6 is a

practical watch, emphasizing the behavioral level without any special attention to visceral or reflective design. This watch is straightforward, with multiple features, and sold at a low price. Put watch (Figure 4.6) next to watch (Figure 4.7), while the second watch may not be intuitive to use it carries a strong reflective emotion. The reflective delight in showing off the watch and explaining its operation to friends and acquaintances outweighs the functional. That delight is the exact moment where the value of reflective design shines. In his book about the role of industrial design, *Watches Tell More than Time*, the designer Del Coates explains that "it is impossible, in fact to design a watch that tells only time. Knowing nothing more, the design of a watch alone - or of any product - can suggest assumptions about the age, gender, and outlook of the person who wears it" (Coates, 2003). There has for decades been a strong push for purchasing products seen as exciting, a conversation starter or an extension of your perceived personality (Norman, 2004).

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Figure 4.6
Behavioral Design - Functional



Figure 4.7
Reflective Design - Interesting

**" PRODUCTS CAN BE MORE THAN
THE SUM OF THE FUNCTIONS THEY
PERFORM. THEIR REAL VALUE CAN
BE IN FULFILLING PEOPLE'S
EMOTIONAL NEEDS, AND ONE OF
THE MOST IMPORTANT NEEDS OF
ALL IS TO ESTABLISH ONE'S
SELF-IMAGE AND ONE'S
PLACE IN THE WORLD."**

NORMAN 2004; P. 87

DESIGNING WORKPLACES FOR A BETTER YOU

A connection to the reflective emotion one feels to a product can also be seen in how individuals emotionally connect to their workplace. Young, politically engaged jobseekers are increasingly demanding that employers enshrine values and ethics in their business model. Almost half the workforce (42%) now want to work for an organization that has a positive impact on the world, according to research carried out by consultancy Global Tolerance. The survey of more than 2,000 people found 44% thought meaningful work that helped others was more important than a high salary and 36% would work harder if their company benefited society (Jenkin, 2015). Employees want the act of volunteering to play a role in their work life. A study conducted by the America's Charities organization showed that an overwhelming 68 percent of employers say their employees expect them to support volunteering. In response to these numbers, nearly 50 percent of employers responded saying that workplace giving has become an essential growth strategy within their organization (talentmanagement, 2015).

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"Employees are not just working because it is a job, the work becomes an extension of themselves. Values don't stop or start when you get into the office or go home, they are a part of you and what you are passionate about. There's no point just saying that compassion is a value on the homepage of your website – compassion needs to permeate the whole business."

Jenkin, 2015

Patagonia is an excellent example of this - not only do they connect with their employees on a behavioral level - fulfilling the environmental and societal expectations created on the visceral level but they push their employees to become better selves. In 2017, Patagonia employees

donated more than 1,700 hours of labor to various environmental groups. They are a positive example of a company that has succeeded in aligning their internal volunteer program with their external values and mission, strategically enabling their employees to find their place in the world (Patagonia, 2017).

Design becomes a powerful extension of a company's decision to embrace their values and encourage their employees to 'walk the talk.' Some of the most powerful awareness campaigns are built by employees who have connected personally to the company brand. The organization behind *Cards Against Humanity* is an excellent example of this. The game, in which players react to questions with the funniest card in their hand, has, for years thrived on unorthodox approaches and an unusual structure bringing awareness to topics their employees and fans are passionate about. *Cards Against Humanity* has found a way to connect the lifestyle, humor, and honesty of the people that work there with the company brand, in turn creating one of America's most loved products. (CAH, 2017)

In 2015, *Cards Against Humanity* charged shoppers \$5 for absolutely nothing in return. "The greatest Black Friday gift of all is buying nothing," they said. In 2016, it encouraged people to donate money so they could dig a massive hole at a secret location in the United States and live-stream it on YouTube, raising \$100,000 for charity. And most recently in 2017, they bought up a plot of vacant land along the Mexican-American border in a bid to stop Donald Trump building a wall (McCahill, 2017). While this approach will not fit the brand values of the majority of companies, it is an excellent example of a growing trend where employees' work is becoming an extension of themselves. This trend can be evidenced on their careers web page in looking for

an intern. Their attention to copy and examples of email replies (Figure 4.8), proudly showcases that employees are part of something bigger - that this is not just a job, but a lifestyle (CAH, 2017).

“You have to enjoy helping people (particularly angry people) and making their day. You’ll get to work in a collaborative environment where interesting projects spring up and require that someone learn how to fix our stupid printer again or send care packages.”
(CAH, 2017)

The authentic approach put forth by *Cards Against Humanity* not only increases the chance of an applicant’s cultural fit but also clearly positions expectations. The honesty threaded throughout the job posting speaks to a more trustworthy and open work environment, a quality that is



Figure 4.8
One of several email response examples placed on the *Cards Against Humanity* website.

increasingly important for individuals. In the case of *Cards Against Humanity* their bold approach, both in the office and throughout their external marketing strategies consistently aligns with their choice to engage in political campaigns. They are able to approach the political topic from a unique, honest, and refreshing perspective that advances their brand further.

The decision for an organization to take a public stand in politics, environmentalism, and diversity can carry considerable risk, but the research numbers stated previously suggest that staying neutral may no longer be an option. The reflective level of emotional design concerning an employee's connection to their workplace cannot be ignored. Becoming a better version (or in the case of *Cards Against Humanity*, an honest version) of oneself has become part of the experience that an employee looks for in a future employer. When an organization goes above and beyond and enables employees to find their place in the world they are connecting to the reflective level - the highest level of emotional design.

"Attractiveness is a visceral level phenomenon -- the response is entirely to the surface look. Beauty comes from the reflective level. Beauty looks below the surface. Beauty comes from conscious reflection and experience. Knowledge, learning, and culture influence it. Objects that are unattractive on the surface can give pleasure. Discordant music, for example, can be beautiful. Ugly art can be beautiful."

Norman, 2004; p 87

Reflective design, at its base, is about creating memories and experiences that fuel a positive lasting impression of a product (Norman, 2004). In

relation to internal branding practices a company at a visceral level may be attractive to a potential employee, at a behavioral level it may fulfill these assumptions and function as expected but where a company can truly shine is at a reflective level. Aligning a company's values and mission to enable employees to practically 'live out a brand' is one way to accomplish a higher level of reflective emotional response.

DESIGNING EXPERIENCES THAT HIGHLIGHT SUCCESS

By focusing on the specific aspect of creating memories a company can further harness reflective design throughout the employee lifecycle. One company that is championing this is Airbnb. At their offices worldwide "Ground Control" teams have been established with the goal of "Looking after the workplace environment, employee recognition, celebration, and events while continuously shaping the employees' experiences in ways that reinforce belonging" (Clune, n.d.). They achieve this mission through pop-up birthday celebrations, anniversaries, or baby showers.

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"It's simply thoughtful and caring people paying attention to it in a way that's culturally relevant - bringing our global travel mindset and mission to life. We remember that we need to have a full life and we integrate work with what's going on in the world. If employees personally experience the company's purpose and feel they belong they can help clarify Airbnb's brand proposition to others."

- Global Head of Employee Experience, Mark Levy (Clune, n.d.)

The boundaries are being blurred, and individuals are increasingly placing value on the same fulfillment they experience through their work as through their daily lives "Unlike many Moderns, Millennials

want to be home for dinner, and want to feel like their 9-5 job has a real purpose. They are constantly seeking purpose in what they do for a living and at the same time want to know how their job is helping them get to the top” (Moore, 2014).

Airbnb realized the changing landscape in employee retention, and by capitalizing on designing experiences that connect an employees life events back to the company, they are tapping into reflective level design. A birthday, engagement or pregnancy may not always be celebrated at home. Through the simple hanging of a banner, company birthday gift or deliberately designed experience, a company can potentially create a moment that will stick in the mind of an employee forever. Capturing these moments through photography or video and placing them throughout the office space or showing them at yearly events can be one of the most influential ways a company can tap into the reflective level.

“Photographs more than almost anything else, have a special emotional appeal: they are personal, they tell stories. The power of personal photography lies in its ability to transport the viewer back in time to some socially relevant event.”

Norman, 2004; p 50

Increasingly, companies have started to utilize the power of storytelling and authentic photography in attracting, motivating, and celebrating employee success.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, Adidas Group, in 2007, was struggling to attract and retain valuable employees. They relied solely on their external consumer brand to attract talent, and most of that

talent was coming from direct competitors. The industry, in general, was getting much more creative at attracting talent and Adidas needed to reinvent their approach. That same year Adidas Group launched a campaign intersecting authentic storytelling and visual communication which celebrated their employees. In response to the launch, Adidas Group reported roughly 8 million visitors to their career site - an increase of almost double (Ind, 2017). They realized the power of authentic storytelling and chose to engage with the emotional moments their current employees have experienced while working with Adidas Group. The recruiting team, worldwide, asked staff members some simple questions: "Why did you join the Adidas Group?" "What keeps you here?" "What has been your most emotional moments since joining?" "What do you like best about your career here?" (Ind, 2017; p 165). Employees answered and with over 500 stories the design team clustered them into themes, breaking them down further into five key accounts which were presented to leadership. In (FIGURE...) Adidas Group shares the components that they built their widely successful campaign around (Ind, 2017) In the words of Steve Fogarty, [Senior Director of Talent at Adidas Group],

"These storytelling platforms unlocked the door for our recruitment marketing campaigns to reach a broader audience and allowed us to focus our efforts and harness the collective, global team to amplify our voice globally."

Ind, 2017; p 167

By capturing and celebrating authentic moments in a current employees lifecycle, both Adidas Group and Airbnb continue to build an employer brand in harmony with external perceptions. Current employees are strongly encouraged to highlight their successful, emotional and internal

experiences to be used in external employer branding campaigns (Ind, 2017). Just as looking through a photo album a company now has the ability to capture work experiences that look back on celebrations, successes and milestones within an employee's life cycle. These celebrations are then packaged, edited and advertised back to employees through photography and video continually reactivating the reflective level response. While most companies who engage in this form of reflective design do so from an honest and authentic standpoint, the potential for emotional engineering could not be more apparent.

In March, 2015, Facebook launched their "On this day" feature which works to provide a nostalgic effect to its users by presenting old memories including photos, statuses and posts from previous years (D, 2017). Facebook found that individuals were not posting frequently, and in order to "reactivate" engagement, the company looked to the power of memories to reengage millions of users to share (D, 2017). The persuasive influence of memory is no secret to marketing, but with the rise of internal marketing employees are finding themselves pulled into a nostalgic loop. Through photography and video, a company has the power to activate a reflective level response, reminding individuals of celebratory moments or "better times" and reactivating their connection to company brand.

DESIGNING MOMENTS OF INTERNAL PRIDE

The third and final correlation between Normans Reflective Level of Design and Internal branding practices is the ability for a company to create pride for its employees. As mentioned earlier the reflective delight in showing off a product and explaining its operation to friends often outweighs any behavioral level design problems one might encounter. "Prestige, perceived rarity, and exclusiveness work at the

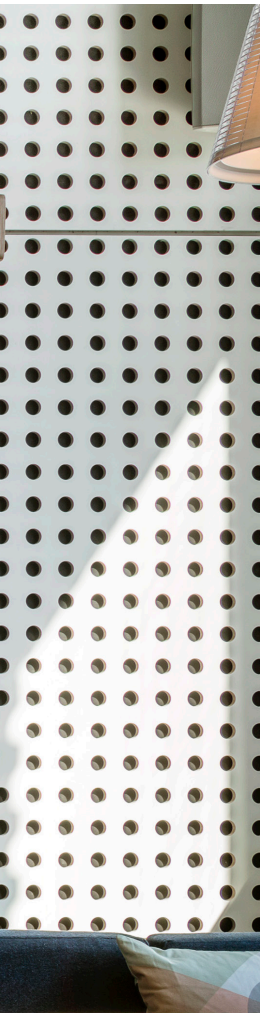
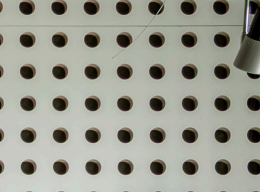
reflective level. Raise the price of Scotch, and increase the sales. Make it difficult to get a reservation to a restaurant or entrance to a club and increase desirability” (Norman, 2004; p 88). These are reflective level tactics that can and have been carried over to internal branding strategies. In 2016 Airbnb boasted 180,000 resumes for 900 positions (Yohn, 2018). Adidas, in the same year announced 800 000 applications for roughly 4000 corporate roles (Minchington, 2016). By sharing these staggering numbers, current employees regard their positions with the company as an achievement - something to be proud of. The FinTech company N26 GmbH, chooses to play to the emotional response of exclusivity by hosting employee only parties in some of Berlin’s famous, underground nightclubs. (Plugers, personal communication, 2018) These parties allow employees to feel like they are a part of an exclusive group, celebrating the success of the fast-growing startup.

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“Reflective design cannot be guaranteed: it is all in the mind of the beholder” (Norman, 2004). But just as with the design of a product, a company can use impressive design to create moments where there is a high chance an individual will emotionally connect to the experience. By enabling and encouraging opportunities where employees can become a better version of themselves a company is fulfilling an inner longing to ultimately establish one’s self-image and one’s place in the world. Through highlighting employees successes and celebrating personal life events, a company can help create strong emotional ties and memories linked to company brand. Lastly, by realizing the influence of prestige, perceived rarity, and exclusiveness an organization can play to the emotional cravings that are intrinsically present in all of us.

5. CONCLUSION





As was premised through the introduction and theoretical framework, an employee's emotional connection to their place of work is strongly impacted by design. Moreover the ways in which an organization chooses to engage with potential and existing employees will determine the success of their efforts. By borrowing the emotional framework from Norman's Theory of Emotional Design (2004) and juxtaposing it against current internal branding methods, I was able to cohesively unpack the innovative ways companies are capitalizing on design, hoping to connect employees to company brand emotionally.

Norman argues that successful design excels in three levels of emotional design the first being visceral level (appearance and pleasure during first interaction). First impressions, whether meeting and new individual or visiting a company website for the first time have long been known to evoke strong subconscious feelings within milliseconds of the encounter or experience. This experience is described as a visceral level response and is responsible for the perceived, fundamental qualities of an object or experience and how the experience makes the observer feel. Creating visually appealing first impressions are critical to a great design and by applying the learnings of Emotional Design to Internal Branding practices, a

Figure 5.0

Airbnb, Dublin, Ireland - Each meeting room has been inspired by listings from around the world and the likes of Portugal, Greece, Romania, Japan, Sweden, Morocco and France have been referenced in the spatial design (Banks, 2017).

company can capitalize on these first, essential moments. Spatial design, as seen in the case of Airbnb and Shopify draws on the company values, tangibly articulating the expectation of current or potential employees. Furthermore, as shown in the case of N26 GmbH companies are finding creative ways to evoke positive first impressions earlier. N26 GmbH tangibly expresses the value of its new employees by shipping welcome packages to their respective homes before their first day. This visceral experience is paramount to creating a positive mindset that will act as a base for a successful onboarding experience. Visceral design, at its root, is about setting positive expectations. A company has one chance to shape an individual's first encounter, and by harnessing the power of design, an organization can experiment with visually appealing ways to subconsciously create a favorable mindset. The hope is that this mindset will carry through to strengthen their subsequent emotional connection with their workplace.

The second level of emotional design discussed was the Behavioural level (usability and performance). A company's choice to not only fulfill the visceral level assumptions but improve on these assumptions and create an environment that embodies the "whole experience" is an expansion of Norman's theory. Furthermore, as seen in the case of Patagonia, through aligning the internal and external brand communication a company fulfills the expectation set through external branding efforts. By aligning these efforts employees are encouraged to 'live the brand' resulting in a stronger emotional connection to their company.

Lastly Norman examines how the reflective design level (the meaning, self-image, and message) impacts a users emotional connection to a product. Through further literary research, the reflective design level drew the strongest correlation to internal branding practices. The rising

**"EMPLOYEES ARE NOT JUST
WORKING BECAUSE IT IS A JOB, THE
WORK BECOMES AN EXTENSION OF
THEMSELVES. VALUES DON'T STOP OR
START WHEN YOU GET INTO THE OFFICE
OR GO HOME, THEY ARE A PART OF
YOU AND WHAT YOU ARE PASSIONATE
ABOUT. THERE'S NO POINT JUST SAYING
THAT COMPASSION IS A VALUE ON
THE HOMEPAGE OF YOUR WEBSITE –
COMPASSION NEEDS TO PERMEATE THE
WHOLE BUSINESS."**

JENKIN, 2015

expectation for organizations to take a stance on political, environmental or social topics carries a considerable risk but staying neutral seems to no longer be an option. Engaging with employees to create awareness campaigns or aligning the companies vision and values to better our world are increasingly expected. Not only has a change been observed in the way a company connects with globalized issues but also how a company connects to an employees lifecycle. This is seen in the case of Airbnb who introduced teams with the goal of looking after the workplace environment, employee recognition, celebration and events (Clune, n.d.).

By continuously shaping the employees' experiences, using design to capture these moments and displaying them throughout their offices, a company reinforces a strong message that an employee is valued. Norman's theory puts forth the idea that prestige, perceived rarity, and exclusiveness contribute to a reflective level response (Norman, 2014). As seen in the case of N26 GmbH or Adidas companies have taken this learning and also applied it to create prestige for their employees, harnessing a powerful emotional connector present in all of us.

This study has not only brought about further understanding on internal branding practices, but also lends consideration to a potential devious side of emotional design resulting in an increased level of control and responsibility a designer carries. Emotional design, when applied to products may encourage extra sales, but emotional design when applied to experiences introduces a higher level of human responsibility, one that a designer needs to be aware of and develop a social stance on.

Norman's Theory of Emotional Design (2004) discusses how visceral, behavioral and reflective design must all coexist together to create

the ultimate experience. While emotions are complex, his research theory presents an uncomplicated understanding of how an individual places emotional value on a product. The evolution of ideas around the concept of service-dominant logic, contributes further, placing importance on the decision a company makes to consciously market themselves internally. The focus should not be on attracting or retaining talent but on the employees' value-creating processes. Creating value at a visceral, behavioral and reflective level will bring an employee on an experience and in the end, these experiences are responsible for emotionally connecting an individual to company brand.

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