

## BACK TO LIFE | USING CULTURAL ASSETS TO STIMULATE INNOVATION

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Prepared for the 12<sup>th</sup> European conference on creativity and innovation to accompany the presentation entitled “Flexing the Imaginative Muscle: how London’s businesses are using the capital’s cultural assets to stimulate innovation.”<sup>12</sup> August 2011  
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Writing this concluding blog (the third of a series) reporting on the More than Money workshop on the road this warm Sunday afternoon in August, I am aware of how this reflection process which has not only allowed me to revisit the archives of research for the workshop and book Imaginative Muscle and have new conversations with people along the way, it has enabled a blog to be curated - longer than anticipated and one I hope you enjoy reading – that highlights how innovation and creative knowledge exchange in organisations and businesses can be explored through; objects, storytelling, human interaction and creative spaces and this is something to shout about.

Blog one we are not alone | illustrated the critical role of space and objects in knowledge exchange:

If there isn’t fluidity, comfortableness, adaptability the experience will not be an open and enjoyable one for the participants or the facilitators; we are not alone and we can listen and learn from our surroundings, colleagues, objects and buildings and takeaway an enjoyable experience, whilst learning along the way.

Blog two objects surface stories | stories provoke a response demonstrates:

Objects surface interesting stories, subjects, and avenues to explore; they overcome barriers in a group and are valuable icebreakers. We also found objects are catalysts for knowledge transfer and a powerful qualitative research tool.

The final blog back to life | using cultural assets to stimulate innovation tells the story of the workshop’s last exercise and how it opened up dialogues about businesses utilising heritage and cultural objects for business strategy and how objects play a key role as emotional indicators for innovative products to be developed. I use the term back to life, as the case studies used for the workshop, and Leeds Museums Galleries own stories, highlight tangible ways in which cultural objects and spaces and people can bring about relevant and innovation strategies in

\* effective two way relationships expanding on a sponsorship partnership between a museum and a business

\* a business; redesigning its headquarters, developing a cultural strategy:  
internal communications and branding through external communications

The case studies introduced attempted to discuss how a business uses an archive and objects as part of cultural strategy and to ask Leeds Museums and Galleries staff:

- \* can you think of good examples of business and archives working together in a two way relationship, how and why?
- \* how could a museum present to businesses advising them on how to develop cultural strategies through objects or if this is happening how and why?

One group told the story of how they had chosen the case study: Pringle of Scotland because they could relate to the processes and possible outcomes of the two-way relationship.

Case Study: The Pringle Archive 1815 - 2010

- \* Partnering with Central St. Martin's College of Art and Design
- \* Promoting and supporting talent through education project
- \* Completion of a comprehensive archive
- \* Development of future re-issues of iconic vintage styles and original Scottish manufacturing techniques
- \* BA History and Theory course researching and cataloguing the existing archive and hosting 'Pringle Day of Record' [see poster]
- \* Members of community bring along generations Pringle of Scotland and memorabilia to be recorded
- \* MA Fashion and Design Students design and create modern interpretations and exhibit at London Fashion Week (source: Pringle of Scotland press release) unique memories of the factory

We found this case study [Pringle of Scotland] was unique to the company. It was creating an archive from scratch. We felt that this was creating a historic archive where there wasn't one, it was very much high knowledge transfer. It was all about gathering that knowledge. We felt that some of it was unique as Pringle of Scotland are trying to create something that would otherwise be lost and disappear; unique memories and artefacts related to the actual factory. Other companies who found themselves in similar situations [could use this] model.

The fact that it involved the training of students in research, oral history, collection management, interpretation, design skills and intergenerational interaction was important. It potentially sounds like successful project, but it depends on the outcome and quality of the students' work.

As part of this exercise the curator at Leeds City Art Gallery shared his story of how the paper collection was used in a two-way relationship project; a developed mentor project exploding the hierarchy in a law firm. It started as an audience development project,

asking people to come in and work with the collection. We invited a local firm of solicitors to select and curate an exhibition using artworks from the paper collection on the theme of landscapes. The firm did take a bit of persuading, as initially they couldn't see what was in it for them. We weren't thinking about business case scenarios at all, we wanted the employees to come and work with our collection. It ended up being a good case for the company as the participants were from all aspects of the company, not just senior management there were; senior management, partners and clerical staff. The project was about exploding the hierarchy within the business.

These kind of Community Choice exhibitions had happened before but people were simply asked to come and look at what's in the store and an exhibition would be created from 'Oh I like that, I'll put that up'. We wanted to take it to another level, be a bit more of developed mentor in our approach. We employed a facilitator to be a neutral voice, we didn't want the 'expert curator' to dictate to the participants, and we didn't want the curator's knowledge and expertise to be relied upon.

Participants looked at catalogues, and chose paintings they liked from a visit to the store. The facilitator asked people to start thinking about why they had selected that work and they ended up reconsidering their choices thinking about how their choices could work together in terms of an exhibition. This was revelatory, they saw that paintings weren't just nice pictures on a wall, that they actually meant something and had a story behind them.

The project allowed people to mix with other people in the business they didn't get to meet. It was a good example of developing people skills and confidence. The business used the exhibition as a communication tool to talk to their clients through a private preview event.

It is evident that the museum's staff are working with objects in many knowledge exchange ways with business and other stakeholders. They are of course natural storytellers and More than Money enabled people to share new stories and experiences around objects that they work with everyday. One feeling that weighed heavy in this workshop was that new conversations, projects should be two-way and that outcomes of a project with a business are an important factor to be considered and implemented, conversations and relationships should be sustainable and not just be a fleeting experience. A couple of snapshots of the businesses case studies used in More than Money follow. They identify the importance of objects; in archives, cultural artefacts, or human objects, for various business strategies: corporate communications

In 2010, we started a series of history brochures - the first one was 'Barings in the Middle East' - designed to show clients that we have long tenure in the markets where we are operating. It has been pretty memorable putting these history brochures together because they actually involved me going to the archive and looking through the documents

myself, with obviously Moira and Claire there helping me and obviously finding the right material and steering me in the right direction. There's something special about looking through the old documents and seeing the letters that the partners themselves must have written at that time, it's a real historical experience.

Alasdair Anderson [pictured below] Barings' Investment Communications Manager. To read more on Barings see the blog the function of a business archive Cultural strategy | building design 'Standard Chartered is known for its strong values driven culture. Our values: courageous, responsive, international, trustworthy and creative, were here before this building. When our buildings are designed and planned our values are always at the back of everyone's mind. The reception [picture below] reflects our business focus in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The different artefacts were picked to reflect out interesting history and culture. Art and artefacts are moved around the building from time to time to create freshness and surprise.'

Andrew Hunter, Group Head of Corporate Real Estate Services, Standard Chartered Bank, to read more see blog source the 'heritage' object internal communications

Recently, I met John Entwisle, Group Archivist, Thomson Reuters for a coffee and catch up at the Museum of Docklands; his insight into the important business use of an archive is poignant in these austere times: 'you 'flog' your heritage, it has a higher priority as it makes the business unique and interesting'

The picture below is John at his desk writing his 'exciting' story blog that he sources from the archive and distributes in a newsletter every few weeks to 56,000 staff. The blog has a huge response and the comments section is very active, often identifying related stories for John to investigate. It is seen as an important knowledge tool that staff can read in their lunch hour.

For more information please see the blog: what is an archive

I would now like to share with you some quotes from the book Onward; How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing its Soul by Howard Shultz CEO of Starbucks - a bit of light reading in-between PhD research books. The quotes sum up

\* how a business in a time of trouble reflected on its practices and direction and went back to its founding aims to develop strategies that were relevant to changing times and sustainability \* how human experience is a key area of development internally to enhance to the customers experience

\* how curation of its stores are crucial to the customers physical Starbucks experience amongst a stores objects are integral to its success

\* how success changes and has to be re-assessed but always be tied to founding aims and ethics

We can look at these and ask how could More than Money enhance innovation through objects?

### A New Way to See

Feeling somewhat skeptical, I entered the large event space of Seattle's Palace Ballroom for a three-day brainstorming retreat. Historically, I was not a fan of business consultants. Rarely had I looked to outsiders to tell Starbucks what Starbucks needed

Starbucks' leaders debated, disagreed, and occasionally laughed as we envisioned a future that involved much more than opening new stores.

We had a delicate balance to strike.

A balance between heritage and innovation.

Between meaningful tradition and modern-day relevance...

I told them [participants] the meeting was about much more than making money or putting bandages on old wounds. We needed to rediscover who we were and imagine who we could be

Our ongoing challenge is to creatively nurture coffee's essence, keeping it personal despite our size. I do not want Starbucks to be defined solely by its thousands of stores or millions of customers.

More than our scale, the brand can and should be defined by the quality of its coffee as well as its values. Community. Connection.

Respect. Dignity. Humor. Humanity. Accountability.

It is our mission to make sure the world sees us through these lenses.

Benevolence

Our partners' attitude and actions have such great potential to make our customers feel something. Delighted, maybe. Or tickled. Special. Grateful. Connected. Yet the only reason our partners can make our customers feel good is because of how our partners feel about the company. Proud. Inspired. Appreciated. Cared for. Respected. Connected.

..we do have high expectations of ourselves as we try to manage the company through the lens of humanity. Starbucks' coffee is exceptional, yes, but emotional connection is our true value proposition.

..our founding mission [was] to achieve the fragile balance of profit with a social conscience. Magic I love to experience different stores...I am a sponge, always soaking up store design, layout, and salespeople's behaviors... ..one of my favorite places to visit it Colette...The owners are curators, and shopping Colette is an adventure in discovery. The merchant's success depends on his or her ability to tell a story. What people see or hear or smell or do when they enter a space guides their feelings...I have always understood this. So when, in 2006 and 2007, I walked into more and more Starbucks

stores and senses that we were no longer celebrating coffee, my heart sank. Our customers deserved better.

Paul and I hope you've enjoyed this story of More than Money out on the road and the extra little noticings that have been found on this journey.

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