

# ARTS EQUAL 3/2017

This policy brief is meant for employers,  
HR experts and managers.

## Art enhances well-being at work

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photo: Elina Manninen / Keksi

**Work-related burnout and stress cause enormous costs to employers and the society. The potential of art activities as a source of both well-being and productivity at the workplace hasn't yet been sufficiently recognized or used. Art belongs in all work communities.**

### Proposed measures

The objective of this policy brief is to build up information on the possibilities offered by participatory art activities realized by professional artists at the workplace. Traditionally places of employment have purchased art to be displayed at the workplace. There are also other ways to bring art into work communities. Artists and arts can serve as developers of the work community and enhancers of well-being. We encourage work communities to explore the potential offered by art and cultural activities.

### ACTIONS TO PUT FORWARD:

- As a work community, take on different opportunities to use arts: Employ a residential artist for a year or hire an artist to come and work for a few hours to support well-being and inspire changes in work practices.
- Manager, encourage your staff to participate in the art activities and serve as an example by taking part yourself.
- HR expert, acquire and enable new skills in your work community through art.
- Use art-based work methods also in organizational development.
- Support your employees in participating in art and cultural activities also in their leisure time with e.g. culture vouchers.

### WHAT DO ART ACTIVITIES REQUIRE TO SUCCEED?

- Participation requires that employees have the chance to take some time away from their regular duties.
- Members of the work community need to be heard when decisions are made about the form and realization of the activities.
- The activities need to be organized in a way that enables any interested employee to participate.



## Research

The well-being effects of the arts have been studied extensively over the past few decades. The effects may be indirect and they are difficult to measure, let alone predict. For example, art activities are not a remedy for bad work conditions. The economic impacts of the arts are also difficult to demonstrate directly.

According to international research, art activities in the work community can have notable positive effects on the well-being of the staff. The effects derive from a wide range, from brief moments of refreshment to longer-term impact. Research has shown a connection between art activities at the workplace and, for example, increased creativity. Art activities support the employees' social well-being and inspire them to innovate. Art activities have helped organizations to shift from common solutions to finding new approaches to their work.

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Work communities have stepped out of their comfort zone and tried and developed new practices. The atmosphere has improved and cooperation among different kinds of people has become smoother.<sup>1</sup>

Art interventions have been proven to have positive effects on organizational, cooperation and management skills and on self-development among the staff.<sup>2</sup> The impacts of arts and culture have also been studied in the business sector by examining, for example, how art-based activities could serve to develop an organization or certain parts of it. Art-based organizational development has been shown to have considerable indirect economic impacts.<sup>3</sup>

International studies have confirmed a correlation between participation in art activities and staff health. According to a Swedish study, emotional exhaustion and depressive symptoms occurred less frequently among employees working in places where art activities were on offer. The decision making practices at these workplaces were also more flexible.<sup>4</sup> The positive health effects were more pronounced and lasting among the leaders and managers who took place in a two-year art-based leadership development program than among those who took part in an ordinary leadership program.<sup>5</sup> In a Lithuanian hospital the well-being and health of the nursing staff improved in many ways when they were offered painting activities at the workplace. Participation in the activity raised the employees' levels of vitality and energy, reduced fatigue and improved their emotional well-being.<sup>6</sup> The general stress levels and salivary cortisol (stress hormone) levels decreased among office workers in London's City when they took part in brief lunch time visits to an art gallery.<sup>7</sup> In Sweden municipal employers have achieved encouraging cost savings with a residential artist project through a decline in sick leave absences.<sup>8</sup> Among health care professionals there is growing evidence of the potential of the arts to reduce stress and work-related fatigue and to enhance their well-being and improve job performance.<sup>9</sup>

When art activities are offered at the workplace it should be done in a way that ensures equal opportunities for the employees (including e.g. shift workers) to participate. Otherwise feelings of envy may arise among the staff, which in turn can lead to a negative work atmosphere.<sup>10</sup>

Research has also shown that it is good for the employer to support the employees' art and cultural activities also in their leisure time. International studies suggest that the more people engage in the arts and culture the better their perceived mental and physical health is.<sup>11</sup> A Finnish study among health care professionals showed a connection between cultural leisure activities and well-being at work.<sup>12</sup> Another Finnish study demonstrated a positive association between the using of cultural services and activities and self-rated health and quality of life.<sup>13</sup> In a Swedish study medical employees in public health services administration went to the movies, art exhibitions and concerts or sang in a choir once a week. The study showed through a randomized controlled trial improvements in the self-reported physical health among the participants. The participation also had a positive effect on their social functioning and vitality.<sup>14</sup>

Promoting the well-being effects of art at the workplace calls for collaboration between the cultural field and employers, as well as stronger networks and the development of new effective practices these involve.

## Art increases human and economic welfare at the workplace

Art is a timely issue. The Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's government program drafted in 2015 underscores in one of its key projects the importance of the arts, well-being and health in people's lives.<sup>15</sup>

Well-being refers to an individual's experiences and feelings concerning her or his life and its meaningfulness. Employees who feel well experience their work as important, are committed to their work and able to respond to their need for recovery. Well-being also includes a social dimension: in a functional work environment people support one another and share a sense of belonging in a meaningful community that fosters both positive brief encounters and longer-term interaction among the staff.<sup>16</sup> Well-being at work is a sum total of many different factors. It is something that is born in everyday life and work. It can't be achieved by health campaigns that aren't connected to the workplace. Activities that enhance well-being are transversal and long-sighted. They may be centered on, for example, the staff, the work environment, the work community, work processes or leadership.

Investment in well-being at the workplace is well worth the while. According to calculations by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Rissanen & Kaseva 2014), lost labor inputs cost the society more than 24 billion euro annually. The sum includes costs caused by sick leaves, presenteeism (attending work while sick), disability pensions, occupational accidents and diseases, and the costs of the medical care of the working-age population. The sum would cover, for example, all the costs, as defined in the Finnish Government's proposal on the 2017 state budget<sup>17</sup>, relating to the administration of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Defense.

If engagement in the arts could help to reduce even a small part of the considerable costs caused by lost labor input – such as costs related to sick leaves, presenteeism and disability pensions – it would produce sizeable savings for both employers and the society. There is evidence that art activities realized at the workplace can have a significant impact on the mentioned costs.

**The more people engage in the arts and culture the better their perceived mental and physical health is.**

1 Areblad 2009; Berthoin Antal & Strauß 2016; van den Broeck, Cools & Maenhout 2008; Pässilä 2012; Rantala, Heimonen & Rönkä 2015; Styhre & Eriksson 2008.

2 Artlab 2009; Berthoin Antal 2013; van den Broeck et al. 2008; Robinson & Dix 2007.

3 Berthoin Antal & Strauß 2013; Schiuma 2011.

4 Theorell et al. 2013.

5 Romanowska et al. 2011.

6 Karpavičikūtė & Macijauskienė 2016.

7 Clow & Fredhoi 2006.

8 Areblad 2009

9 Wilson et al. 2016.

10 Tuisku & Houni 2015; Theorell et al. 2013.

11 Cuypers et al. 2012; Davies et al. 2016.

12 Tuisku et al. 2011.

13 Nenonen et al. 2014.

14 Bygren et al. 2009.

15 <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/implementation-of-the-government-programme>

16 On the definition of well-being OECD 2013; De Simone 2014.

17 The Finnish Government's proposal to the Parliament on the 2017 State Budget. Dated 15 Sept. 2016. Finnish Government.

## How to find the doers?

If you want to find an artist for your work community you can turn to, for example, the following sources for advice:

- Arts Promotion Centre Finland
- Taiteen käytön ja hyvinvoinnin kehittämishjelma: [www.taike.fi/fi/tietoa-ja-neuvontaa](http://www.taike.fi/fi/tietoa-ja-neuvontaa) (development program on using arts in the development of well-being, info in Finnish only)
- Läänintaiteilijat (Regional artists)
- [www.taike.fi/fi/laanintaiteilijat](http://www.taike.fi/fi/laanintaiteilijat), info in Finnish only
- Pro Soveltavan taiteen tila (Space for applied art)
- [www.prostt.fi](http://www.prostt.fi) (in Finnish only)
- Arts@Work, Hobby Agency
- [www.hobbyagency.com](http://www.hobbyagency.com)
- local artist associations
- individual artists, artist groups or companies working in the field

## What can art activities in a work community be?

Art activity in a work community doesn't require artistic skills from the participating employees. The work community defines the need and goals of the participatory art activity together with the artist. It can be, for example:

- drama work
- writing exercises
- working with image-based methods (photography, painting, drawing, 3-D techniques)
- dance and movement exercises
- working with music
- multi-art, cross-artistic work

### EXAMPLES:<sup>1</sup>

- A dramaturge works in a unit of a health care district for a little over a year. She coordinates in one of the unit's multi-professional teams workshops dealing with the themes and challenges of the work community, using drama methods.

1 For more examples, see Horn & Vapalahti 2017; Ikäläinen 2017; Lehikoinen et al. 2016; Rantala & Jansson 2013.

- An artist performs a four-month art intervention with the teaching staff at a vocational college. New practices and perspectives are developed in workshops on teaching, learning and interacting with students by drawing alone and together, writing and discussion.
- Performing arts professionals work for two years at a big private clinic and coach the work community to function better as a team to increase customer satisfaction to build up business.

### ARTISTS TELL:

- "The direct feedback I hear the most is: 'It' feels great that we're doing something else than talking. It's great that no one's showing any slides.' Everybody's totally fed up with sitting around staring at slides."
- "Many jobs are hectic and there's a lot of pressure. [...] When you dig under the surface in these coaching events and people feel inspired, it increases the sense of community and mutual trust and understanding."<sup>2</sup>

2 Unpublished interview material from ArtsEqual. Also see Ansio et al. (2017).

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The ArtsEqual policy briefs present to policy makers latest research and research-based discussion produced by the ArtsEqual initiative. The Arts Equal research initiative, coordinated by the University of the Arts Helsinki, examines, in collaboration and interaction with more than 50 partners, how the arts as public service can increase equality and wellbeing in Finland and meet the social challenges of the 2020s.



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