

THE NEED AND PROCESS OF GENERATING INNOVATIONS BY CORPORATE MUSEUMS – CULTURAL EXHIBITION UNITS OF ORGANIZATIONS

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Purpose: Corporate museums are something more than traditional ones. As unusual means of promotion, apart from disseminating the values of history and culture, they become their founders' brand and prestige manifestation. The aim of the article is to emphasize that in order to fulfill this task effectively, corporate museums must be innovative. On an empirical level, the aim is to evaluate a set of guidelines which implementation can help corporate museums meet the goals for which they have been established.

Design/methodology/approach: Theoretical part of the article has been prepared based on desk research analysis of available source data. In the preparation of the empirical part of the work (evaluation of the model for creating innovations in corporate museums), the results of the review of social profiles and websites of corporate museums were taken into account. The results of a personal (unformalized) interview with employees of corporate museums were also helpful, primarily of the Mladá Boleslav automotive museum and Waław Sakwa Foundry Art Gallery - an exhibition unit operating at the author's workplace.

Findings: In modern, complex conditions of turbulent environment it is impossible to imagine functioning of corporate museums without undertaking by them continuous creative changes. However, the mere awareness that innovations constitute an impetus for the success is insufficient from the point of view of corporate museums considering the possibility of introducing new solutions. Therefore, they have to consider particular suggestions on the practice of generating innovations which should be followed in order to improve the process of creating new solutions.

Research limitations/implications: This study focused on analyzing literature data and checking the perspective of employees of sample facilities, which may narrowed the perception of innovation in corporate museums phenomenon. A way to verify and deepen the received conclusions may be further examination from the perspective of a larger number of employees as well as to compare the obtained results with museums located in distant countries. Recommended direction for further research would be broadening perspective and conclusions.

Originality/value: The topic of corporate museums is not widely considered in the literature and this thesis offers a systematic attempt to apply general innovation theory in a exhibition unit context in order to advance knowledge on innovation in corporate museums, conceptually and empirically.

Key words: innovations, corporate museums, new solutions, culture.

Category of the paper: conceptual, research.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the new millennium, the world entered a time of increasingly faster and more unpredictable changes. Life and the conditions for performing any activity on the market are currently shaped by variability and unpredictability - turbulence (Lane, Down, 2010). Researchers are even of the opinion that turbulent times are not an aberration, but a new face of normality (Kotler, Caslione, 2009). All entities present on the modern market must operate in increasingly complex conditions, in a world of uncertainty, an abundance of data and information, unpredictability of phenomena (as demonstrated, for example, by the Covid-19 pandemic), as well as the dynamism of socio-economic processes and strong competition. The sources of these conditions should be sought in social, demographic and political changes, in the development of modern technologies and, finally, in the ongoing processes of globalization.

The increasing pace of changes taking place in the environment constitutes a challenge for science and is of key importance from the point of view of the practice of managing organizations. Both scientists and managers are increasingly consider how to effectively manage an organization in the dynamic conditions of the modern economy. It seems that one of the clear answers was given by A. Wyroba and J. Tkaczyk, who claimed that "the globalization of business activity, the development of new technologies, the increasing importance of competitiveness and cooperation result in the need to place greater emphasis on innovation" (Wyroba, Tkaczyk, 2015, p. 5). In this context, it is not surprising that in recent years this relatively new category has been included not only in the subject of scientific research, but also in practical initiatives and programs of the European Union. Already in the European Union's Europe 2020 strategy, which is a continuation of the Lisbon Strategy, fulfilling the need for the so-called: intelligent development was underlined, which should be identified with taking actions aimed at increasing the role of knowledge and innovation as the driving force of future development (Markowska, 2014).

According to this doctrine, it is impossible to imagine the survival of modern organization without undertaking continuous creative changes in order to keep up with changing environment. In an economic situation characterized by strong competition and permanent and dynamic changes in the market situation, organizational development strategies must be based to a greater extent on the introduction of innovations. Obtaining and then maintaining a competitive advantage and the development of entities in turbulent realities is conditioned by the creation of new solutions in the form of products and processes, as well as the development and implementation of previously unprecedented business models (Porter, 2001). This approach is consistent with the words of H. Ford, who at the beginning of the last century, already, expressed belief that companies grow thanks to development and improvements.

“But when an organization stops being creative, when it thinks it has achieved perfection and now only needs to produce, it is doomed to failure” (Joseph, Rodenberg, 2007, p. 234).

It may seem, however, that the need to generate innovations does not apply to museums. These are, nevertheless, organizational units that do not operate on the market based on traditional, commercial principles. Their leading mission is not to make a profit but to preserve the achievements of humanity and broadcast them to future generations. This is to be done by „collecting and protecting the natural and cultural heritage of humanity of a tangible and intangible nature, providing information about the values and contents of the collected items, disseminating the basic values of history, science and culture, shaping cognitive and aesthetic sensitivity, and by enabling the usage of collected stuff” (Žuk, 2011, p. 173). Due to this, museums traditionally occupy a special place in the system of development and distribution of socially oriented values. They retain status of a synthetic and prestigious cultural institution in modern society. They „unites the progressive and innovative areas of architecture and design, research results, fundamental and applied sciences, achievements in engineering and cutting-edge technologies” (Maystrovskaya, 1997, p. 7).

As X. Castañer and L. Campos emphasize, it is understandable to believe that entities described in such categories do not have to follow news at all costs and be very creative in their activities. These are rather the areas of economy and technology that known solutions quickly become obsolete, while in art and culture, earlier forms and works do not lose their importance and can still be used (Castaner, Campos, 2002). In reality, however, it is different because nowadays museums also have to meet the growing demands of both their organizers and recipients (Della Corte et al., 2017). At the same time, as mentioned previously, achieving a competitive advantage and meeting the addressed requirements becomes possible only thanks to innovations (Crossan, Apaydin, 2010). Hence, creative activities, e.g. in the form of creating a diversified offer or using a wide range of forms of communication, also become a necessity for museums.

At the same time, the so-called corporate museums are in a particularly demanding situation. This is due to the fact that these are special cultural exhibition units. The corporate museums are thematic, commercial buildings, owned by a particular organization, where the history of the brand and products development is presented (Piatkowska, 2014). They not only satisfy the visitors’ desire to receive new information, but also realise the business goals of brand representation, both increasing loyalty to it, and developing corporate culture (Bondarenko et al., 2020). In the article, the author explains the concept of these specific cultural units in more detail and explains the need to generate innovations by them. Above all, however, he focuses on attempting to define a set of specific guidelines, how to generate new solutions in corporate museums so that their operations can keep up with the requirements arising from modern times.

2. Corporate museum as a specific type of exhibition unit

Among the various museum facilities, there are also, so-called: corporate museums which are of interest for this study. Despite their long pedigree, corporate museums constitute a field of study that has been little explored and that occupies a particular position, at the intersection of the cultural realm of public museums and the world of business, and is characterized by a managerial vision. Corporate museums should be considered in terms of physical structures in which the history and the memory of an organization are told (Bonti, 2014). These are exhibition complexes devoted to the history, present and future of the organizations that sponsor them. Any object can be considered as such, which:

- is only an additional, side establishment for the organization by which it was created, it is maintained and managed,
- is a cultural institution established to collect, store and preserve objects of historical or artistic value,
- all or part of these objects are made available to the public in the form of permanent or temporary exhibitions (the rest are stored in specially adapted warehouses),
- very often presents the achievements of the organization to which it belongs, e.g. it displays the results of production processes that have taken place over the years (e.g. a vehicle manufacturer may display old car models of its brand),
- must have financial background and human resources ensuring the durability of its activities (one-off and ephemeral activities will not meet the durability requirement, even if they consist in activities typical for a museum, e.g. presenting an exhibition) (Barbasiewicz, 2021).

Many organizations (including enterprises, universities and even public institutions), both in Poland and abroad, have decided to create their own corporate museum. It seems that companies operating in the automotive industry are, among others, very active in this field. It turns out that some of the private museums of automotive companies are located even quite close to Poland. An example is the Škoda automotive museum (Figure 1), located in the center of Mladá Boleslav (a statutory city located in the Central Bohemian region, north of Prague), opposite the Bondy shopping center and Škoda Auto factory. It was once the building where the company's founders - V. Laurin and V. Klement - started their work in 1895.

The Škoda Museum was opened in 1995 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the company's establishment. In this facility, on an area of over 1800 m², the history of the Škoda Auto a.s. company is presented (as well as its predecessor Laurin & Klement). It is a modernly designed facility, established in accordance with the provisions of Art. 2, Par. 4, Act No. 122/2000 Coll, on the protection of collections of museums and amending certain other laws. As a part of a diversified, engaging, interactive and multimedial walk in the Skoda museum, visitors can get acquainted with both the oldest models produced by the company

(the company's first product was the "Slavia" bicycle) as well as contemporary, modern cars (Vojtechovsky, 2005).



Figure 1. Corporate museum of Skoda Auto in Mladá Boleslav.

Source: author, 5.07.2023.

It should be emphasized that the above-mentioned and similar, own exhibition facilities are usually not aimed at making a profit (as it may be to some extent, in the case of museums established not by organizations, but by private individuals - enthusiasts/collectors who, at some point decide to make money from their hobby by making their collected items available for viewing by outsiders for a fee). Corporate museums are rather intended to promote the organization of which they are a part and this is the justification for their existence (for example, on the website of the Czech Skoda museum, they are referred to as: the brand's showcase). Corporate museums can, of course, derive certain financial benefits from the sale of admission tickets (and they usually do), but their basic function is to achieve the appreciation of the favorable attitude of stakeholders. It is assumed that visitors will subconsciously transfer positive feelings about what they see in the organization's museum to the organization itself.

Such an approach seems to be justified. First of all, the creation of own exhibition facility can be a very eloquent signal that the organization is not only convinced of the need to protect artifacts constituting national treasure, but also that it is actively involved in this work (although it does not have to be formally). Hence, by opening its own museum or gallery, institution proves that it takes special care of the heritage of the past, and thus further strengthens the belief in its social responsibility among members of its surrounding: in this way, the parent entity is perceived "not only as a selfish entity, caring only for its own benefits, but as a socially sensitive organization that gives something particular to society" (Pabian, 2008). Further benefits are related to:

- Image building. Part or even the entire exhibition in ones own exhibition facility may be devoted to the achievements of the organization or its outstanding employees. This increases trust in the organization. People visiting its museum can be convinced of the rich achievements, competences and experience of the organization.

- **Recognition strengthening.** An exhibition facility makes the organization known to an even wider public (also to people who, for example, do not buy its products on a daily basis). Visitors also remember the name of the organization that deals with a given facility.

In this case a multiplier effect appears. Visitors are often eager to share their impressions of the visit with family members, beloved ones and friends. In addition, a corporate museum or gallery may also become the object of media interest. Articles, reports or broadcasts can significantly contribute to increase the general recognition of a given organization. In this context, a corporate museum becomes an excellent public relations tool, contributing to the possibility of achieving the goals of integrated marketing communication.

3. The need for innovations in corporate museums

In order for the exhibition units described in the above categories to bring image benefits to their parent entities (for which they were mainly created), first of all they have to be attractive from the point of view of potential visitors. This is why museums' ability to attract people is drawing the increasing interest of both scholars as well as practitioners (Manna, Palumbo, 2018). First of all, they must move away from informational to performative museology, i.e. from strictly controlled narratives defining the path through the exhibition towards more flexible compositions encouraging viewers to follow their interests and to create their own paths through the exhibition (Ziębińska-Witek, 2014). Dynamically progressing digitalization also means that they must increasingly focus on the wider use of interactive technologies in order to attract the attention of visitors by providing them with new impressions and experiences.

However, to meet such requirements, corporate museums must be innovative. In the modern, globalizing world, there are changes in the functioning of all structures and transformations in ways of thinking. Therefore, all existing elements must adapt to the turbulent environment, including corporate museums. Only new solutions can provide the foundation for making museums' offer more attractive to visitors (Kalinowski, 2010). Nowadays, innovations are necessary in all phases of a corporate museum's existence, starting from the creation of the idea, through the phase of establishing and starting the facility, existing and success, development, maturity, up to the phase of decline and extinction, when they may become the beginning of a new cycle of life. Those museums that cannot adapt to the requirement of innovation will not be attractive to visitors and thus must accept failure or the need to drift in stagnant marasmus. Those that want to be successful or exist must create new solutions and be open to new things.

In terms of benefits from implementing innovation, in addition to the social area (an attractive museum will become a more frequently visited place), there is also the economic area, which is its derivative (Pop, Brzoza, 2016). Innovations can also increase the prestige and reputation of the entire institution. As a result, in turn, ticket sales will increase and, ultimately, the company's own sources of money will increase (Camarero, Garrido, 2012). While the possibility of obtaining such benefits cannot be underestimated, the ability to create or develop novelties is still one of the greatest challenges for contemporary organizations, and this also applies to not-for-profit, permanent institutions in the service of society that exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Despite the necessity and benefits of pro-innovation initiatives, projects and policies, many corporate museums are still insufficiently active in developing new ideas.

This attitude may seem understandable under some circumstances. Generating new ideas is a difficult task, requiring time, personnel and conceptual investment. At the same time, many corporate museums have already achieved a satisfactory status quo. The traditional type of activity continued by these entities brings them the expected results, and current operational needs use most of their creative reserves. From this point of view, additional involvement in innovative activities may seem unnecessary or unprofitable to such museums. By contrast, there are of course, also corporate museums that base their activities on the belief in the need to create and implement certain new solutions. However, regardless of the degree of interest or willingness to create innovations in museums, it is possible to distinguish a certain universal set of recommendations and tips that can help develop their innovative abilities. The mere awareness that innovations constitute an impetus for the success is insufficient from the point of view of corporate museums considering the possibility of introducing new solutions. Therefore, it is necessary to consider suggestions on the practice of generating innovations, which should be followed in order to improve the process of creating innovations in a corporate museums. The next chapter of the work will be devoted to this topic.

4. Results – the practice of generating innovations. Indications for corporate museums

The results of studies indicate that corporate museums need to demonstrate a more open attitude towards non-identical sources of inspiration. It turns out from they employees that one of the basic sources of new ideas for corporate museums is still their own interior - in practice, many of the new solutions still have this independent character. This means that new ideas are created only within a single entity, without external interaction, as a result of the individual ingenuity of its employees and using its own (and parent organization's) competence base. However, it is not without reason that in today's practice a much larger group are progressive innovations, which are the result of interactions taking place between organizations and the

environment in which these units operate. This is due to the fact that changes taking place in the environment force the need to constantly adapt to them. This always happens in the case of a dynamic environment which is usually complex and subject to frequent changes resulting from, among others, the rapid progress of knowledge or the development of new technologies (Davis, 2007). Also, cultural exhibition units which, as if by their statute, are created with the environment in mind, should be more open to external sources of inspiration for new ideas. They have many alternatives possible - exogenous sources of new ideas include: consultants, universities and research centers, fairs, exhibitions, meetings, innovation support programs, etc. (Moszyński, 1994).

Managers of corporate museums must also remember that, according to research on change management, the benefits associated with implementing gradual, slow innovation often exceed those that can be brought by a one-time breakthrough (This fact is, for example, confirmed by S. Hollander's research carried out at DuPont plants) (Hollander, 1965). Therefore, the sought novelty does not have to be radical and far-reaching. Innovations may not go beyond making minor changes in the museum. Researchers even encourage to use the small-step method when creating innovations - do better what we are already good at. They suggest focusing on making small changes from day to day. A simple improvement within the company museum may, in consequence, still result in achieving specific benefits. For example, museum can consider to introduce corrective innovations, i.e. those aimed at improving the already existing, but imperfect elements that create the functional system of the exhibition facility. "Such innovations are usually quick and easy to implement" (Kaplan, 2017, p. 20). An example may include introducing more visually attractive ways of displaying exhibits (modern showcases) or enabling visitors to interact more deeply (in the way of touching) with the elements of the exhibition.

It is also important for corporate museums to go beyond their traditional areas of activity (their interviewed employees indicated five main ones, i.e.: making research, collecting, preserving, interpreting and exhibiting), and focus more on other directions, to look for new development opportunities and encourage people to make visit. This is due to the fact that innovations that may initially seem not directly related to exhibition (and therefore little needed), may bring tangible benefits in the long run. For example, in the already mentioned Skoda museum in Mladá Boleslav, an innovation was introduced by opening additional (non-typically exhibitional) facilities. That is why nowadays tourists visit this museum not only because of the history of the automotive industry. The facility also decided to provide a modern space for organizing events (the museum boasts a new multi-functional room: "Laurin & Klement Forum"), which is being used more and more often every day. The premises host congresses, conferences, meetings, workshops and various socio-cultural events (including lectures on the design of L&K and Skoda cars, workshops for children and even concerts). Visitors to the Skoda Museum are also attracted by the souvenir shop and the modern Vaclav café/restaurant.

The management of BMW Welt (the exhibition facility of the German car and motorcycle manufacturer) has gone even further in terms of innovations that go much beyond changes within the museum itself. The focus was not on changes within the exhibition, but it was decided to offer a completely new value - the opportunity to additionally visit the factory where are produced cars (corporate museum is located next to the factory where the brand products are manufactured). This allows to take a look behind the scenes of car manufacturing, observe specific production steps up close and get to know BMW in a whole new way. BMW Anyone interested can visit Plant Munich after declaring his intentions (via internet or by phone). The Bavarian plant can be visited on working days only, in groups of up to 30 people, under the care of a guide speaking English or German language. The tour around the halls takes about 2.5 hours. During it, visitors have opportunity to see how engines are assembled and sheet metal is stamped to form body parts. They are also allowed to learn about all subsequent stages of the final assembly of the car, from the moment of inserting the engine into the body, to the final quality tests of the finished vehicle (BMW Welt, 2022). Opening the possibility of visiting the factory seems appropriate and justified. This can be used as a benchmark and inspiration for change and innovation within another museums. Innovative approach of BMW has actually brought tangible benefits to its traditional museum too. Many visitors who would not normally visit it decide to do so by the way, when visiting the factory.

Some recommendations can also be made regarding the technical side of generating new ideas by corporate museums. This process should take an organized form, the course of which is determined by specific stages. They together create a sequence of appropriate procedures. In general terms, the innovation process should constitute "a sequence of activities carried out over the time which are necessary to implement a specific innovative concept and to transform it into a new state of affairs" (Baruk, 2002, p. 76). It is true that history knows cases in which previously unseen solutions were created unintentionally or even spontaneously, as a result of a sudden flash of creativity of a single individual. However, have to be aware that most of the new solutions introduced by modern organizations are not the result of a sudden, unexpected epiphany, but they are rather the result of an intentional and organized creative process. In the same way, innovations in corporate museums should appear as a result of the innovation process, i.e. specific activities that create a series of logically consecutive stages, the implementation of which measurably increases the chances of achieving success understood in terms of the dissemination of new ideas (Harvard Business School, 2005).

The first of these activities should be identifying needs. It involves identifying all factors that highlight the need to introduce a new solution. Motives for undertaking innovative activities by a corporate museum may be very different. For example, the inspiration for innovation may be deteriorating financial situation of the facility, the desire to make the exhibition more attractive or, for example, the falling number of visitors. It is very important to prepare a comprehensive description of the problem prompting innovative activities, i.e. to carry out a thorough diagnosis of the sources and causes of individual problems.

In other words, museum cannot stop at just identifying the symptoms of a specific phenomenon, but also outline its causes. It is worth noting that a comprehensive understanding of the situation in which the institution finds itself, as well as finding circumstances in which it operates, already constitutes half the way to achieve success in terms of innovation (Murray et al., 2010).

After the recognition stage, museum's management can move to the next phase, i.e. generating and developing ideas that respond to the observed issues. Ideas for dealing with identified problems may come from various sources. A corporate museum can tap into the intellectual potential of its own employees or look for solutions outside the organization (external consultations often enable acquiring new knowledge and skills, better understanding the environment, determining the quality of work of one's own facility compared to the others, better coordinating activities at all levels of management, etc.) (Głowacka, 2005). An important role in stimulating the ability of a corporate museum to generate innovations is played by the environment in which it operates, especially the attitude of the superior entity managing it and the policy and initiative of public authorities. The adopted system solutions that define the general framework for the operation of such facilities are also important.

Once it has been managed to generate a new idea, it should always be assessed whether its implementation will be beneficial. At first glance, some innovative projects may seem very promising and ideally suited to the specific profile of the museum's activities, and still end up in failure. To avoid this type of problems, the next step should be a phase that involves testing the innovation in practice. New solution should be checked (e.g. entry ticket prices can be lowered, but only temporarily), so that it can be assessed whether the innovative idea can be considered functional. In practice, this phase means pilot implementation of the innovative idea, evaluating it and introducing possible improvements. However, conducting such an initial, common-sense assessment is usually not an easy task. Fortunately, corporate museums have specific instruments that can be successfully used to improve the evaluation stage. To evaluate innovative projects, one or several of the methods grouped within the four basic sets of methods for assessing innovative projects can be used (Szatkowski, 2016). These are: profitability assessment methods (static and dynamic), multi-criteria methods (including additive, of analytical hierarchization and the usage of reference points), mathematical ones (not very widespread - they are used for quantitative assessment and selection of innovative projects). Particularly useful may be also subjective evaluation methods, which use the knowledge and experience of opinion makers who are not normally associated with the museum and who, in accordance with the adopted work schedule and specific methodology, make a qualitative assessment of the ideas presented to them for review (Trzaskalik, 2014).

The last stage, called maintenance, means the implementation and popularization of an innovation that has successfully passed the testing phase. For such an innovation, a model for running the facility should be developed that will ensure its financial success and stability (Wronka-Pośpiech, 2015). It should be emphasized that the implementation by a corporate museum stages of the sequence of innovations' creation proces significantly increases the

chance, but never guarantees hundred per cent, the ultimate success of the new solution. History knows as many examples of successful innovations as there are unnecessary ones, i.e. those that did not catch on in the long run (Glinka, Gudkova, 2011). An example from the sphere of museology is the Museum of Opole Silesia, for which the innovative idea of selecting a director through a competition did not turn out to be successful (none of the contest participants met the detailed evaluation criteria) (Portal Wyborcza.pl, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Sometimes the terms innovation and invention are considered in almost synonymous categories and translated in a similar way. In reality, however, innovation is a broader concept. Researchers explain this by emphasizing that an invention is a new solution to a specific issue, but only one that is of a technical nature. Meanwhile, innovation is defined as newness that is intentionally introduced not only in technology, but also in organization, business activity or in any sphere of human life. „Innovation may also involve transforming an invention into a marketable product or process” (Adamczyk, Gędłek, 2009, p. 5).

Innovations are important not only for companies operating on core market principles. The need for active development in line with contemporary changes also applies to non-profit organizations such as museums. In their context, innovation should be understood as novelty or change that is put into practice and replicated with the intention to bring benefit to the organization that developed it and/or to some of its stakeholders (e.g. audience). Like the entire cultural sector, museums are currently faced with the need to overcome various, complex, and sometimes previously unknown and newly added challenges. The society in which they operate is in a process of constant change, which means that the complexity of the conditions for cultural activities is constantly increasing. In response to these great changes museums must undertake innovations. In order to successfully face challenges, they need new ideas and self-critical reflection on current approaches. Traditional core activities, such as collecting, preservation, research, exhibition, and education have to be supplemented by new issues and fields.

Corporate museums are in a particularly demanding situation. This is due to the fact that the scope of their tasks goes beyond collecting and storing monuments, disseminating the values of history and culture, providing information about the contents of the collected items, shaping cognitive sensitivity, and enabling contact with the collections. Above all, for their founding organizations they are sites of organizational memory relationship to the development of organizational identity. In this context corporate museums are a favored tool for preserving and disseminating a company's culture. Although it is true that, taking into account creativity, like all other museum organizations, they do not traditionally constitute a highly innovative

environment (their tradition and orientation towards the logic of science is the first obstacle), by following the sequence of actions presented in the article, they increase the chances of achieving success in their activities and fulfilling the goals for which they have been established.

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