Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

  Workplace of ONE: Worker experience as the basis for workplace design

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- **Abstract (300 words):**

  In “Art as Experience” (1934), John Dewey defined ‘an experience’ as an individualized process of interacting with one’s environment to achieve an objective. The structure of ‘an experience’ consists of a person undergoing something, which prompts him/her to do something until the self and the situation are mutually adapted and form a conceptual whole. In the built environment, only a space user can give a place its purpose and meaning, its reason for being. The place then becomes a representation of the space user’s experience.

  The attitude that the worker brings to his workplace represents his unique worldview (self-identity). This dispositional state manifests as a unique integral experience that the worker has of that space (place-identity), which motivates the worker to behave in a way that enables the achievement of his performance objectives. The integral experience establishes the worker-workplace relationship. A worker-centered design of workspace must be based on who the workers are and not only on what they do. This design approach suggests a recursive cycle and not an episodic event. In contrast,
methodologies that attempt to define the criteria for workspace design by measuring the objective worker responses to atomistic conditions of workspace negate the integral experiences of the worker. The workers are reduced to an abstraction in the form of a job classifications or skill sets that perform specific tasks rather than acknowledged as unique, individual contributors. This deterministic approach captures only a moment in time in a cycle of perpetual experiential change.

For the workplace to become an experiential environment, it must respond to a dynamic worker relational cycle. The criteria for a design problem definition and solution must be based on an on-going dialogue between workers and organizations with designs as interpreters of emergent change. Thus, work environment design is less about mapping perceptions and more about appreciating human agency.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Branka V. Olson, PhD is a practitioner-scholar with a focus on design thinking approaches to people-centered built environments that result in positive performance outcomes for individuals, organizations, and communities. Branka is a registered architect with a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Michigan and a long-standing consulting practice in which she has defined, designed, and delivered an extensive portfolio of projects for public and private sector clients. She has a PhD from Case Western Reserve University, Weatherhead School in Management in Designing Sustainable Systems. Branka teaches at Woodbury University, School of Architecture in Burbank, California.

Branka’s research resides in the intersection of design theory, organizational behavior, and environmental psychology in examining the experiential effects of work environments on the engagement, satisfaction, and performance of workers. The research has been presented at numerous academic and practitioner conferences, such as The Academy of Management, International Facility Management Association (IFMA), Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA), and Engaged Management Scholarship. Branka’s current research is to develop a scale that measures attitudinal and relational effects of workplace on workers. A second stream of research focuses on relational teams in integrated project delivery methods with an emphasis on sustainable, life-cycle benefits.