

DIGITAL INTERACTION DESIGN

APPLIED TO

**ENVIRONMENTAL
BRANDING**

IN WORKPLACE

TO STRENGTHEN

EMPLOYEES

SENSE OF BELONGING

MASTER'S DEGREE THESIS

DIGITAL INTERACTION DESIGN
APPLIED TO ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING IN WORKPLACE
TO STRENGTHEN EMPLOYEES SENSE OF BELONGING

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Before proceeding with the discussion, I would like to dedicate a few lines to all those who have been close to me in this path of personal and professional growth.

A heartfelt thanks to my supervisor Professor Pillan for his infinite availability and promptness to my every request. Thank you for supporting and encouraging me throughout the journey.

I thank my colleagues of the environmental branding team in Accenture for welcoming and giving me the opportunity to work in an interesting and dynamic place, which allowed me to get involved and have an experience that will be valuable for my future.

ABSTRACT

ENGLISH VERSION

The inspiration for this thesis came from my work experience as a trainee in the environmental branding team at Accenture; this experience allowed me to approach to the world of environmental branding applied to workspaces.

There, I've learned that environmental branding applied to offices, consists in representing through different methodologies, the image of the company through the space; exploiting the environment as a communication channel of the company's values and principles to encourage and enhance the employee's working experience.

My internship experience started in a pandemic period, in which offices were closed and work was done online. Therefore, influenced by this situation and by my background as a digital interaction designer student, I wondered why companies were still investing in something so material and physical, despite a situation in which everything seemed to take a digital or an hybrid direction.

Through a research about the changes of the employees' work experience, it emerged that is precisely for this situation of physical removal between people and the companies, that happened a weakening in the employee-company relationship. This situation has gone to affect the employee's sense of belonging towards his own work environment, lowering motivation and engagement towards his work.

This study aims to explore how the communicative and participatory power of interaction design, applied to environmental branding, can strengthen the sense of belonging; providing the employee a way to interface with the organization and its people, thus reconstructing that point of reference which has weakened.

It will be shown how companies can take advantage of this practice to improve the motivation, the confidence and the work experience of employees; exploiting the new opportunities that come from the field of digital interaction design.

ABSTRACT

ITALIAN VERSION

L'ispirazione per questa tesi è nata lavorando come tirocinante nel team di environmental branding in Accenture; esperienza che mi ha avvicinato al mondo dell'environmental branding applicato agli spazi di lavoro.

L'environmental branding negli uffici consiste nel rappresentare attraverso diverse metodologie, l'immagine dell'azienda nello spazio; sfruttando l'ambiente come canale di comunicazione dei propri valori e principi, con il fine di incoraggiare ed esaltare il lavoro del dipendente.

Il mio tirocinio si è svolto inizialmente durante un periodo pandemico, in cui gli uffici erano chiusi e il lavoro si svolgeva online. Influenzata da questa situazione e condizionata dal mio background accademico da digital interaction designer, mi sono chiesta perchè le aziende stessero investendo in qualcosa di esclusivamente materiale e fisico, proprio in un momento in cui il lavoro sembrava stesse prendendo una direzione totalmente digitale o ibrida.

Attraverso una ricerca sui cambiamenti dell'esperienza lavorativa degli impiegati d'ufficio, è emerso che questa situazione di allontanamento fisico dalle strutture e dalle persone dell'organizzazione, ha portato un indebolimento nel rapporto impiegato-azienda; andando ad intaccare il senso di appartenenza del dipendente nei confronti del proprio ambiente lavorativo, tanto da indebolire motivazione ed ingaggio nei confronti del proprio lavoro.

Questo studio si propone di esplorare come il potere comunicativo e partecipativo dell'interaction design, applicato all'environmental branding, possa andare a rafforzare il senso di appartenenza dell'impiegato; fornendogli un modo per interfacciarsi con l'organizzazione e le sue persone, per ricostruire così quel punto di riferimento che è venuto a mancare.

Verrà mostrato come le aziende possono trarre vantaggio da questa pratica per migliorare la motivazione, la fiducia e l'esperienza lavorativa dei dipendenti; sfruttando le nuove opportunità che provengono dall'ambito del digital interaction design.

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INTRODUCTION

This study has the objective of investigating the possibility of exploiting digital interaction design solutions applied to environmental branding for offices, with the aim of strengthening the employee's sense of belonging to the company.

The reasons that prompted me to choose to investigate this topic come from my experience working as an intern in the environmental branding team at Accenture, in which my job was to take care of the employees experience through the corporate's offices all over the Italian territory; exactly in a moment in which the office working spaces were particularly in crisis because of the lockdowns caused by the pandemic situation.

This led me to investigate the reasons why companies are investing in something as physical as the practice of environmental branding in offices, in a post-pandemic period where the work experience seems to be moving more and more in a digital direction.

The research will highlight how the crisis period has changed the employee's work experience, bringing to light some problems, such as the weakening of the company-employee relationship, going to affect the engagement and motivation of the employee towards his job.

The study aims to investigate how this employee-company relationship can be recovered and strengthened by exploiting the physical presence of companies and more specifically, taking advantage of the communicative power of environmental branding interventions in the offices.

Specifically, to achieve these objectives, in support of the thesis, the environmental branding strategies of various companies will be collected and analyzed to obtain a definition of the motivations and processes that support the use of this practice applied to office environments.

Thus, subsequently demonstrating how the use of digital interaction design solutions applied to environmental branding for offices, can result a more agile and effective strategy in strengthening that weakened employee-company relationship, that sense of belonging that has been lacking in this period of crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Taking a cue from a real branding intervention done into an Accenture office, a guideline on how to carry out an environmental branding project by integrating a digital interaction design solution will be proposed with the aim of realizing a concept scenario of a digital interaction environmental branding project.

The proposal will be shown and discussed with Accenture's environmental branding team, to extract insights on the digital interactive direction that this practice can take in answering to the employees' needs in strengthening their sense of belonging within their working environment.

01 THE NOWADAYS IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEES SENSE OF BELONGING IN WORKPLACE

1.1

POST PANDEMIC SITUATION: A NEW WAY OF CONCEIVING WORKPLACE

How has the working life of employees changed after COVID-19?

Nowadays, in a post-pandemic era, it is quite natural to think about the consequences that this situation has brought to our life: how people's lifestyle has changed and especially, thinking about the life work, how much the perception of the way we work has changed.

In particular, this topic piqued my interest when I started working as an intern in the environmental branding team of a large consulting company known as Accenture, in which my job was to take care of the employees experience through the corporate's offices all over the Italian territory; exactly in a moment in which the office working spaces were particularly in crisis because of the lockdowns caused by the pandemic situation.

In fact, in this pandemic situation, people who usually were used to actively participate in office life, were now forced to work remotely from their homes for several months to guarantee working continuity in a safe way; it was the only way to reconcile the limitations due to the lockdown of travel and workplaces, that were established to limit the contagion.

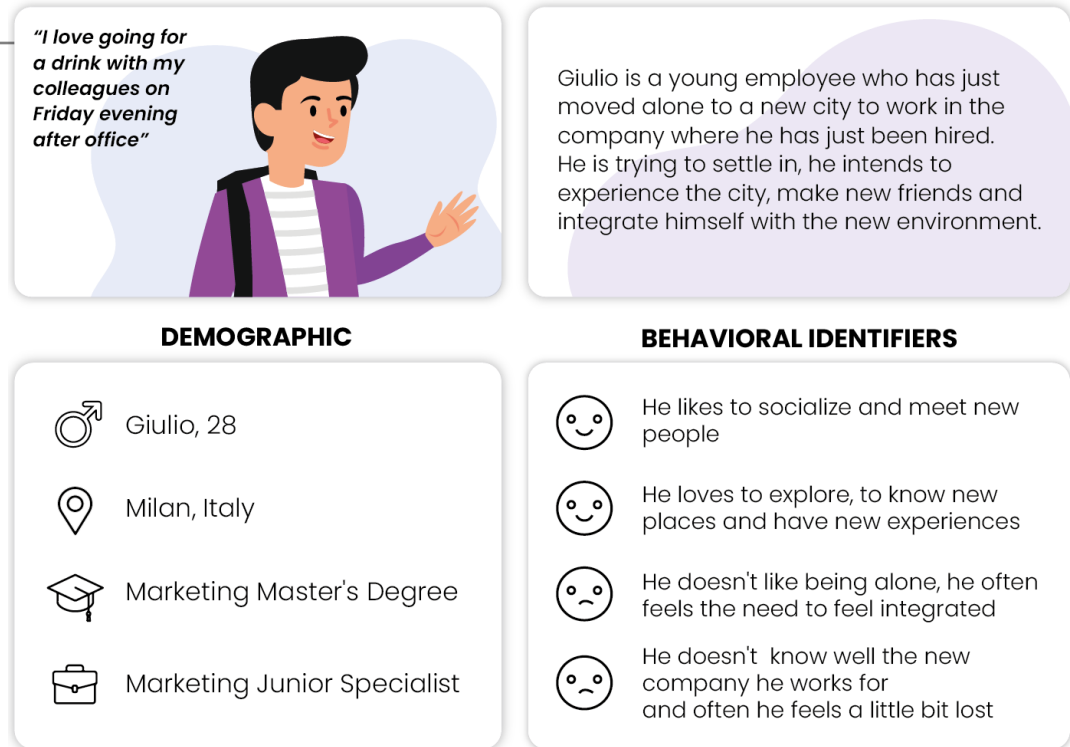
Taking into consideration Accenture's employees and all those employees who used to work in the corporate offices of large companies, I decided to analyse how this situation has brought changes into their work life experience.

To better understand how the employee's working experience has changed, taking inspiration from my experience at Accenture, I built two user journey maps to compare an office employee's typical working day with the one of the same employee forced to work remotely due to the situation.

To contextualize and outline the figure of a typical employee in this situation I have built the *user persona* of Giulio on the basis of the people I have been able to know and meet in the company in these recent months; when due to the different moments of progress of the pandemic and the consequent waves of opening and closing of infrastructures, I was able to gain experience and observe in first person the two different ways of working.

Giulio is an imaginary representation of a typical employee who works in a large consulting company; specifically Giulio is a young fresh graduate boy who has just been hired in the marketing team of a large company and who has just moved from his hometown for this new job.

FIGURE 1.1.1
Giulio's user
persona



From the comparison of Giulio's journey maps, it is highlighted at a glance how much the mood of the same person who does the same job, but in two different ways, can change radically.

In Giulio's emotional journey of the office working day, the greatest peaks of serenity are reached when he goes to interact with other people in the office, for an exchange of advice about working, for a coffee or just for chatting.


Other moments worthy of being emphasized are the moments of pause and detachment from work, made possible by the clear distinction of the use of spaces that Giulio employs: from the workstation to the break areas, that strictly separate moments of leisure from those of work.

This is not possible when Giulio is forced to work from home, where he works, eats and uses his phone in the same environment; thus, creating a fatiguing continuity between work, breaks and moments of leisure.





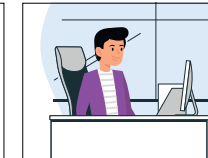
And it is precisely for this reason, that I found it necessary to investigate the after-effects of this forced smart working experience and discuss how this condition is impacting on the perception of one's motivation to work.

Post pandemic situation: a new way of conceiving workplace

OFFICE WORKING DAY



Starting the working day Working Coffee break Working

Giulio leaves the house at 8:30 am to reach the office by public transport


As soon as Giulio arrives at the office, he takes his seat and greets his colleagues around

He joins a meeting with his team to talk about a new project

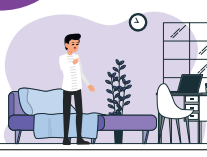



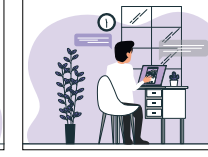
To take a break and refresh his mind, he joins a colleague to have a coffee

Once back at his workstation, Giulio starts working on the new project

REMOTE WORKING DAY



Starting the working day Working

Knowing that he will be working remotely, Giulio gets up 10 minutes before his working day begins

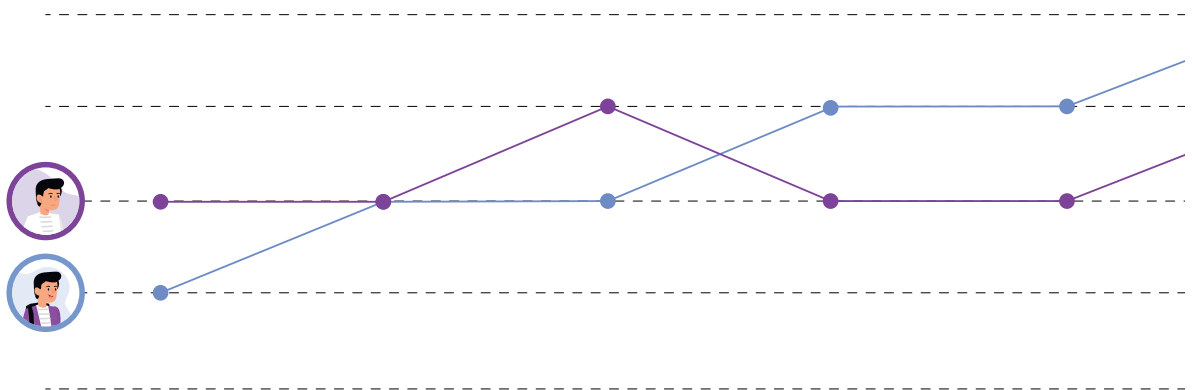
Giulio gets out of bed and takes two steps to his desk to start working

He sends a quick hello to the team in chat, in the meanwhile, he prepares himself a coffee

Giulio joins the bi-weekly project meeting via video chat

Giulio has a quick follow up call with a colleague

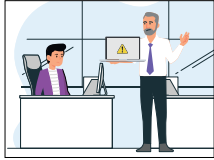
GIULIO'S EMOTIONAL JOURNEY



Post pandemic situation: a new way of conceiving workplace



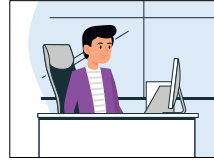
Giulio has lunch with his colleagues



Giulio returns working on the project, after a while, he is interrupted by a colleague who needed help with his laptop



The colleague to thank him for helping, offers him a coffee



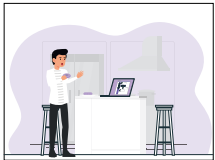
Giulio goes back to work on the project



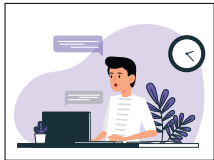
Giulio goes through the office to say goodbye and he has more chats with his colleagues



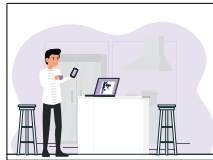
Giulio leaves the office and takes the public transport to return home



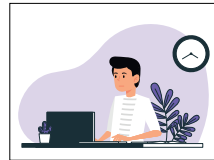
Giulio prepares lunch and eats it in front of the computer



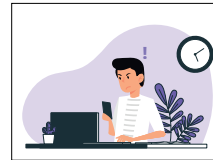
Giulio has another call with a teammate to discuss about the project they are working on



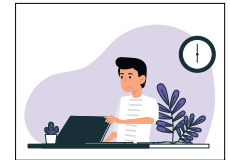
Giulio grabs a coffee and checks his phone



Giulio returns to work on his project



Giulio has problems with the laptop and is forced to call the assistance center to continue working



Giulio sends a quick bye on chat to his colleagues and goes offline

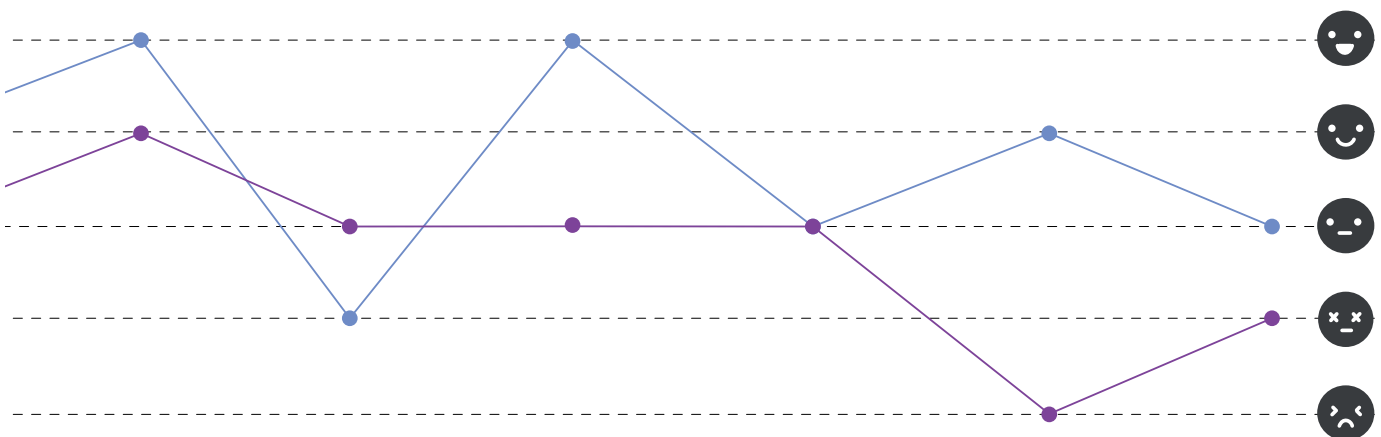


FIGURE 1.1.2 | Comparing the Giulio's Journey Map between an office working day and a remote working day

How did the crisis situation affect the employees working experience?

I started investigating the side effects of this situation on employees' work experience; and I found that recent researches (Deloitte, 2021) has proven that the 100% remote working experience, caused by the pandemic situation, has had significant negative effects on worker wellbeing and mental health: increasing anxiety, isolation, lengthening the workdays with an increased number of meetings, and in many cases bringing the loss of sense of belonging within organizations.

In fact, this shift to remote working implies that traditional workplace rules of contact and behaviour are no longer applied. Without this shared context to help foster trust, cohesion and a sense of belonging, many employees begin to feel isolated, and consequently, less motivated.

Going deep into the research, it also emerged that according to the data from the 2020 Slack's Remote Employee Experience Index, which measures the perceptions of the key elements of working life, between productivity, sense of belonging and work-life balance, the biggest disadvantage that employees recognized, in this crisis situation working experience, was a loss of sense of belonging within the workplace organization.

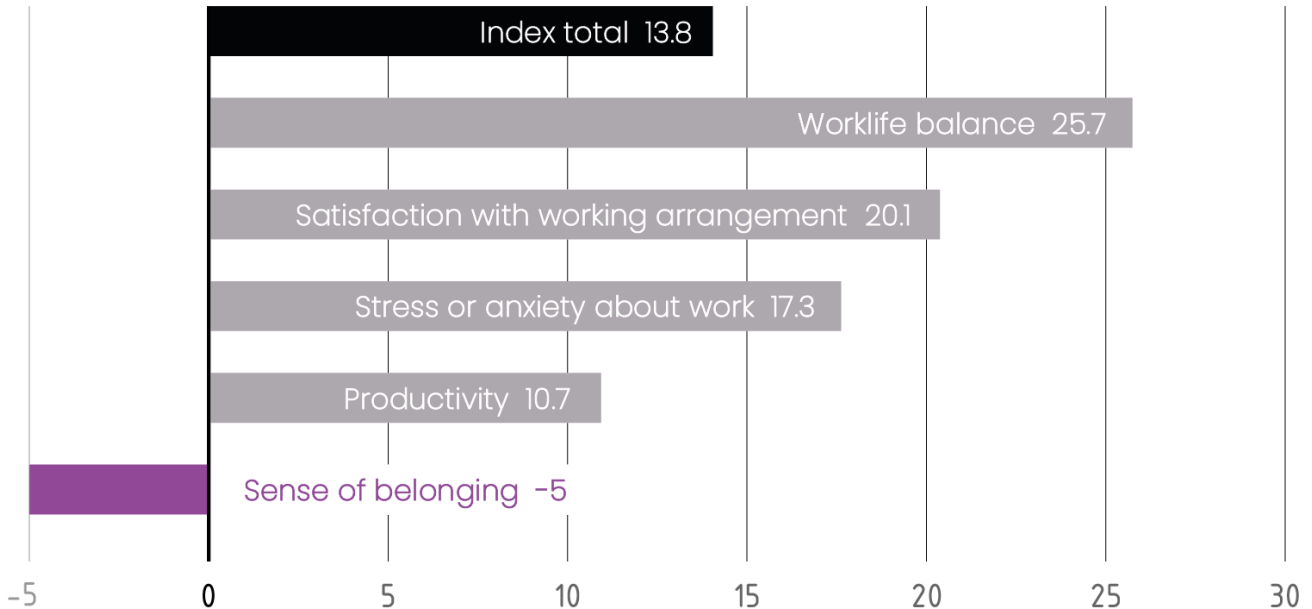


FIGURE 1.1.3 | Remote Employee Experience Index, Slack. 2020

So, I thought it was interesting to investigate about this loss in the perception of this so-called "sense of belonging"; and I discovered that this topic is one of the fundamental components that are part of an effective employee experience, that is, in turn, supported by a bigger pillar: the employee engagement.

Employee engagement represents a set of elements that together, improve the levels of enthusiasm and connection that employees have with their organization. Can be defined as the measure of how motivated people are with their work and organization.

To better understand what are the components that contribute to the satisfaction of the employee's needs, so that a good level of engagement is reached, we can refer to the visualization of these components through the Maslow's Pyramid Hierarchy of Needs (1943, A Theory of Human Motivation), applied to the context of employee's experience.

Following the hierarchical classification of human's fundamental needs in the Maslow's five-level pyramid model; we can see that humans must meet their physiological needs first before they meet their safety needs. And when these two needs are met, humans intrinsically move to seek love and belonging needs, subsequently the esteem needs and finally the needs of self-actualization. A sequence in which humans are constantly seeking higher goals and desires to live a healthy and meaningful life.

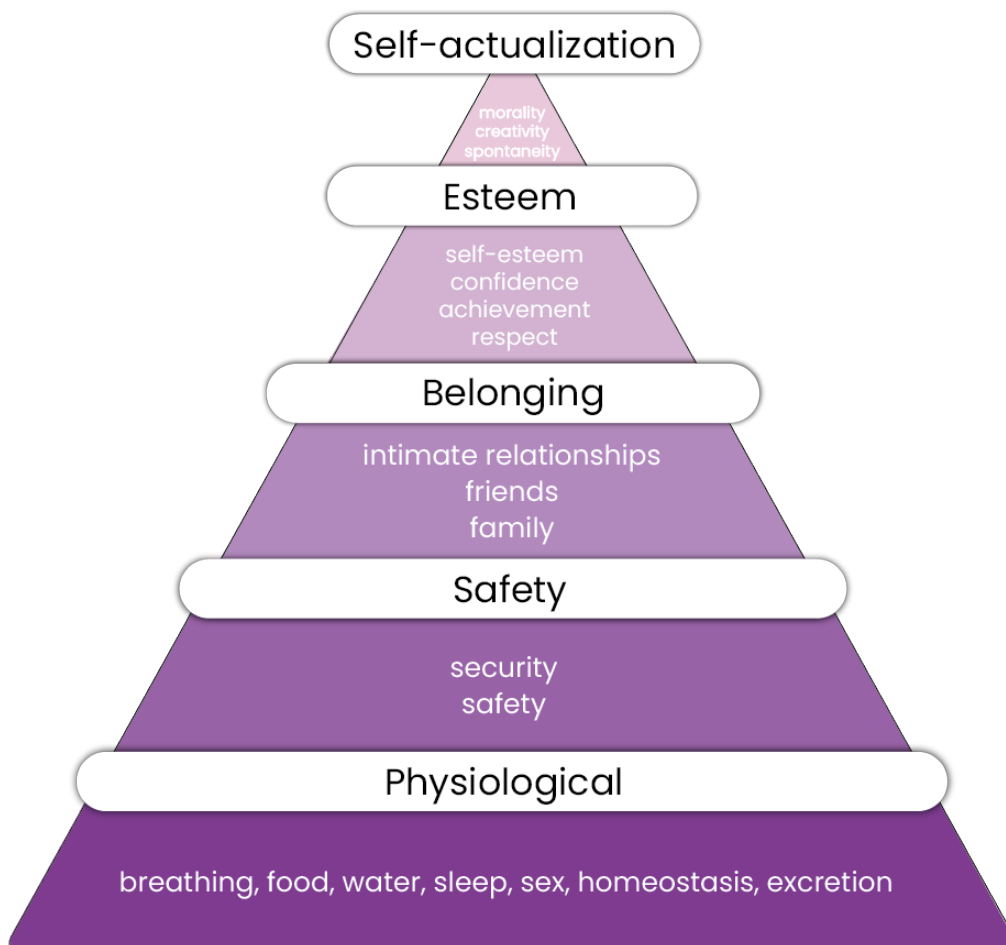


FIGURE 1.1.4 | Diagram of Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Post pandemic situation: a new way of conceiving workplace

The same reasoning can be applied to the work experience of an employee, where, to reach a good level of engagement, it is necessary to satisfy a series of needs related to the expectations that the employee has towards his job.

These needs range from the fulfilment of basic needs like the salary's reception to the job stability, until it gets to meet the higher levels of needs such as belonging, acknowledgment for the working effort and finally the achievement of self-actualization, in which employees want to develop their skills and become experts in their respective fields, to lead and motivate others.

When employees' hierarchical needs are not met, employees show a low level of engagement, and it impacts on their morale, productivity, and retention.

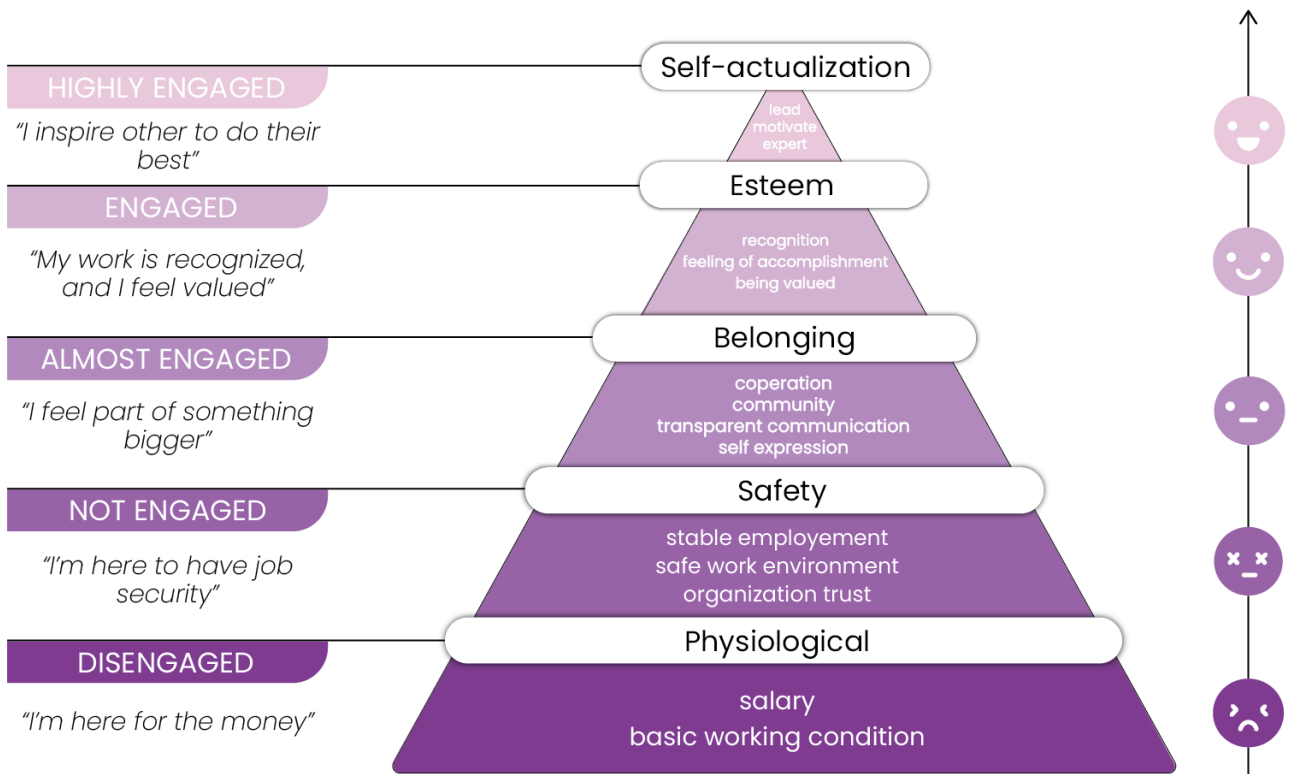


FIGURE 1.1.5 | Maslow's hierarchy of needs applied to employee engagement, source: Engagement Multiplier

However, nowadays we have to take into account that, because of this period of crisis, some of these needs have been compromised.

Post pandemic situation: a new way of conceiving workplace

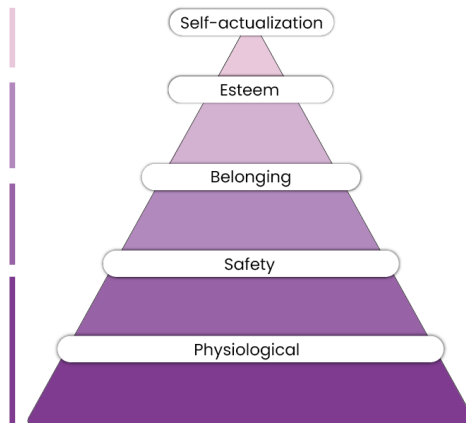
BEFORE COVID 19

Generally managed by self but in a *conductive work environment*.

Employees used to be *appreciated and recognised* in regular group meetings.

It is up to the HR and seniors colleagues to create *a feeling of camaraderie*.

These needs were *taken for granted*. Employers provided them.



AFTER COVID-19

The limited infrastructure and communication channel *affected the pace of self-actualisation*. Motivation is compromised.

Esteem needs have been compromised severely. Managers and peers could not longer keep the feedback loop going and recognise their remote employees in time.

The *flow of communication is compromised*. Employees can no longer bond over impromptu in-person meetings or discuss work over a cup of coffee.

Anxiety, stress over job security, future, uncontrolled and unorganized work environment.

FIGURE 1.1.6 | Maslow's hierarchy of needs applied to employee engagement after Covid 19 situation, source: VantageCircle, 2021

As we can see, starting from the anxiety for job loss and the uncertainty for the future, that are often caused by the lack of reassuring and open communication between the organization and the employees, this situation does not allow employees to reach higher levels of engagement.

In this period of organizational disruption, physical separation, global health and environmental crises, people feel the necessity to look for stable points to refer to, in particular relating to the working reality.

Offering the opportunity to re-establish that lost feeling of belonging towards something more stable and secure in which to refer, compared to what the confused situation offers, could be a significant turning point for organizations to improve employee engagement in this time of crisis.

In addition, research also demonstrates that the sense of belonging, in these last years emerged as one of the strongest drivers of employee engagement ahead of typical drivers like trust in leadership and ability for career growth.

According to Qualtrics's report on 2021 Employee Experience Trends, the research shows that during the pandemic, two new items emerge as the strongest drivers of employee engagement: a sense of belonging and a sense of pride in the company's efforts to have a positive impact on the world.

Post pandemic situation: a new way of conceiving workplace

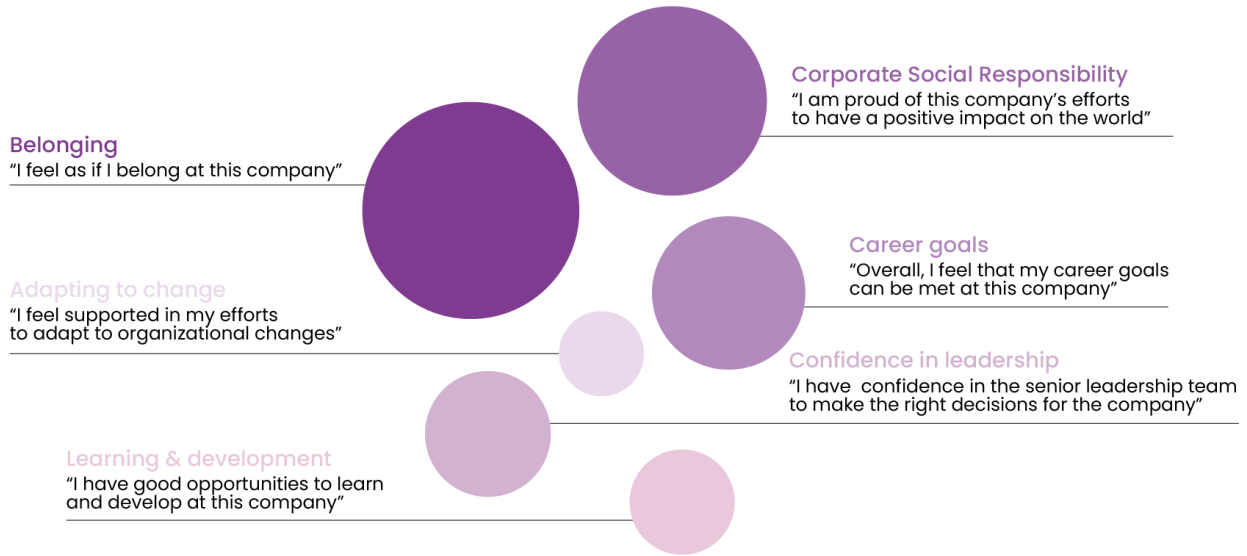


FIGURE 1.1.7 | Driving trends of employee engagement, source: Qualtrics, 2021

Also, according to Deloitte’s Global Human Capital Trends 2020, referring in particular to the Readiness Gap’ report; it had already emerged that seventy-nine percent of organizations said that a sense of belonging to the workforce would be important to their success over the next 12-18 months.

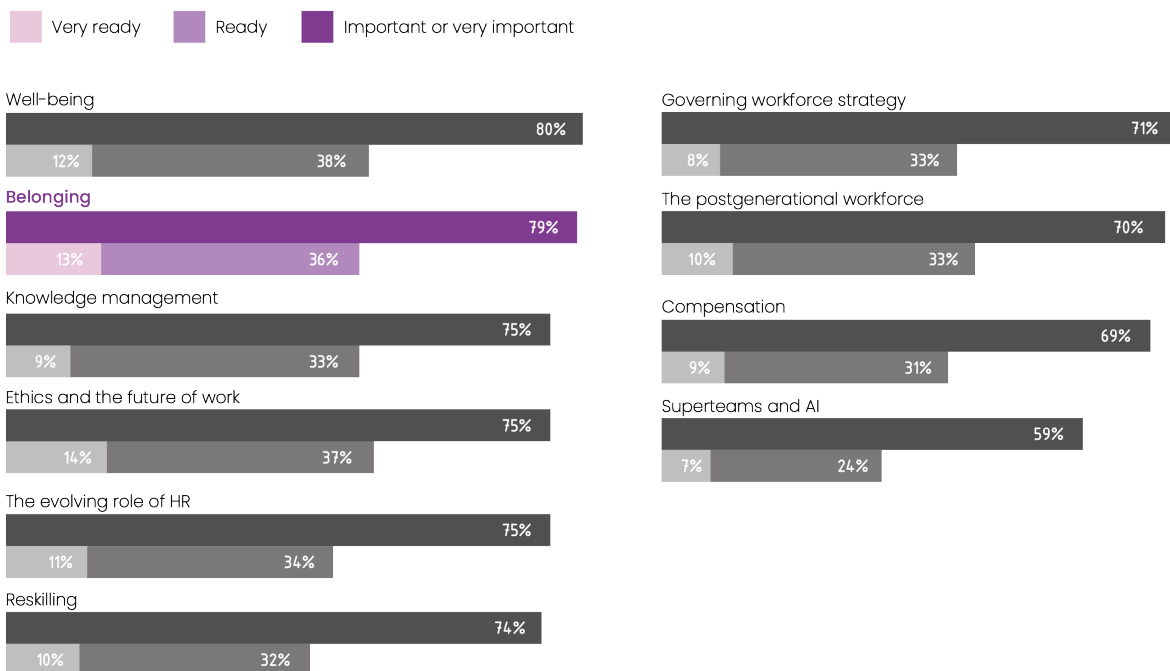


FIGURE 1.1.8 | Perceived importance exceeded organizational readiness for next year’s trends, source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends survey, 2020

This can be explained by the fact that, due to the situation, many people feel the world is becoming less stable and more polarized. This sense of instability may be leading people to turn to the workplace to find the sense of meaning and solidarity that is often becoming more and more difficult to achieve with society at large.

Therefore, from what we have just seen above, it seems that the need to re-establish this “sense of belonging” is something that companies must address to enable people to engage with their work, allowing them to feel stable, fulfilled and safe.

What is the employee’s sense of belonging?

To better understand what this “sense of belonging” was, in relation to the work environment, I decided to look for the basic requirements to satisfy, in order to support the achievement of this need.

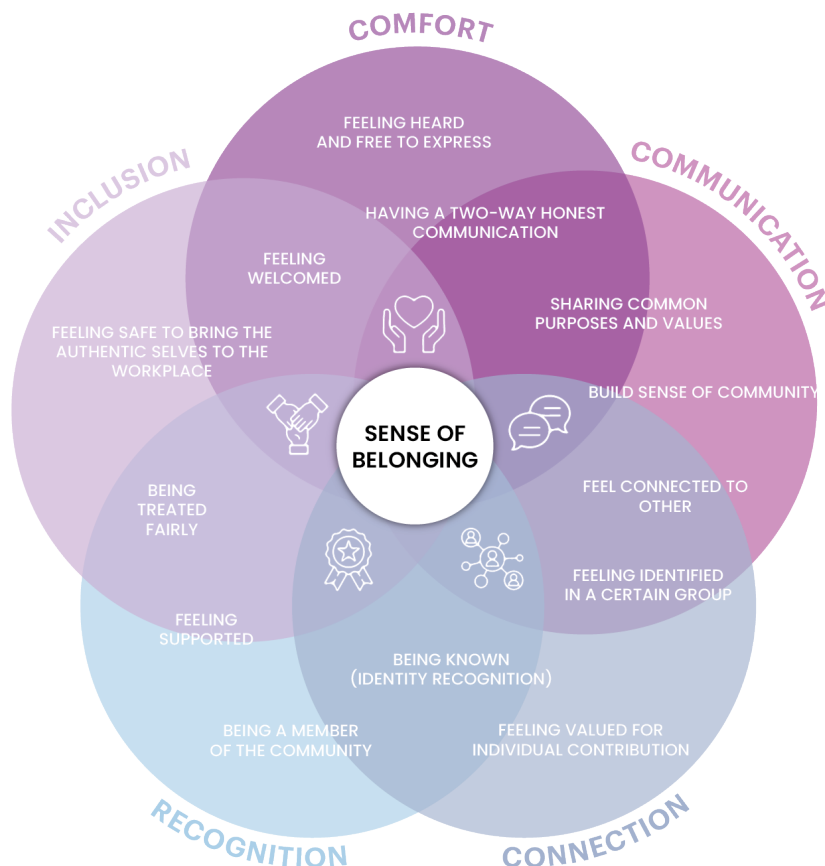
And I found that the belonging can be described as a feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity.

To make individuals feel like they belong, the work experience must be designed to allow people to feel part of something that is significant for them and in which their commitment is valued as essential to make that big “machinery” work.

The feeling of integration into a community, into a place where they can express themselves authentically, feel heard, welcomed and motivated, can be defined as the driver of the so-called employee sense of belonging.

FIGURE 1.1.9

Elements that contribute to achieve a sense of belonging into an organization



We know that the necessity to feel recognized for achievements and valued as individuals is important in all the aspects of our life and this is especially important also in the world of work, and consequently, it is precisely in this field that the need for belonging is intensified.

In fact, it seems that a strong sense of belonging encourages employees to excel in their roles and to connect with the company. A genuine connection not only meets employees' basic human need for acceptance and inclusion but also inspires their work and improves business performance.

In effect, according to BetterUp's latest research (2021), the companies that foster the sense of belonging in their working environment often have employees who are more productive because they feel supported and appreciated. These employees feel more confident making decisions and speaking their minds when they think they have an ally in the company.

FIGURE 1.1.10

What a high sense of belonging leads to, source: BetterUp, 2021



Why is it important nowadays to talk about the sense of belonging at work?

As we have seen (FIG. 1.1.9), the feeling of belonging to a company is related to the emotional sphere linked to trust, two-way commitment and communication between an organization and its members. These key points are essential ingredients to create clarity, closeness with the organization and reduce uncertainty through the employee working-life journey; and precisely, these are some of the elements that have been lacking during the pandemic remote working experience.

Indeed, during the period of remote working, communication was needed to become intentional and planned: companies had to understand how to communicate efficiently with their employees, with which frequency, which were the most effective channels, what to talk about and when to listen. This kind of communication can be perceived by remote employees as a not spontaneous and generic communication created only for a vast majority of people, which means that the message may not always pertain to them and often it causes them to feel "tuned out".

When an employee is experiencing feelings of exclusion and a lack of connection with his team or organization, that sense of belonging will begin to fail and consequently he won't be able to put his full energy into his work (FIG. 1.1.10).

While in the office, as we have seen previously, in the Giulio's journey map (FIG. 1.1.2), the communication path happens spontaneously: an employee can have a chance to run into a manager or colleague and take advantage of that time to connect with each other in a more natural and organic way.

In the light of the facts, natural communication and interaction are considered an essential foundation for keeping employees interested and engaged: employees tend to value quality time with their managers and their peers when they see links between their own values and the values of their organization, in that situation they are more inclined to be engaged. This is significant, because quality time, as we have seen previously, is more likely to occur in the office than it does for remote workers.

Therefore, companies need to blend technologies such as emails, meetings, and webcasts; to ensure the right mix of engagement for their employees, they also need to know the right time to switch off technology and focus instead on building human connections creating informal interaction opportunities.

This is the reason why, while working remotely, many employees, having lost a natural and personalized communication channel with their company and its environment; they felt only a number, losing the exclusivity of their workforce and the contact with the reality to which they belong.

THE WEAKENING OF SENSE OF BELONGING AT WORK

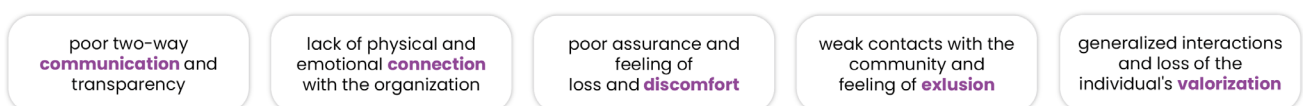


FIGURE 1.1.11 | Scheme that summarizes, in the light of what emerged, the weakening of the pillars that support a sense of belonging at work

It is in this sense that workplace can be considered as a community space in which the work's values and objectives connects people to others by providing a sense of common guide purpose.

This is the fundamental reasons whereby employees need to know the "why" of what they are doing in order to be aligned with the organization's objectives.

And it is precisely for this reason that companies must do their utmost to communicate to their employees the complete picture of what they consider valuable.

If a company is able to communicate its brand values, goals and future goals, it provides employees with a reason and insight, into how their personal effort affects the company as a whole, fostering their sense of belonging.

To achieve this level of engagement, companies should create a network of shared knowledge, ideas and values; capable of generating a shared cultural base in which employees can recognize themselves and feel safe and valued in it.

Workers who are alone at home, on the other hand, are more prone to feel alone; they may lose sight of "what it's all for" and become disconnected from their jobs and co-workers.

This is for me, one of the main reasons why companies should try to physically bring their employees back on board, at least for a partial part of the working time, to find a way to re-establish that connection, that sense of participation and belonging between their employee and their job reality.

1.2

EMPLOYEES SENSE OF BELONGING: A KEY POINT TO RE-ESTABLISH THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE WORKPLACE

How did the pandemic situation change the metrics that predict the sense of belonging?

To better understand which drivers to focus on, to restore the sense of belonging, it was necessary to take into account that the pandemic has favoured new way of perceiving work and that consequently these drivers could have gone under some changes.

According to the BetterUp Labs research (2021), these changes in the work habits, had a direct impact on employee's sense of belonging and on the overall satisfaction with his work. This influences how people feel while they work or whether they feel disconnected from their office environment.

Through the research it can be noticed that the predictors of a high level of belonging at work are changed. Before the pandemic situation, the parameters that predicted a high sense of belonging within the workplace were social connection, emotional regulation and authenticity. During the pandemic, while social connection remains a fixed predictor for belonging, other parameters such as relationship building, and self-compassion emerged.

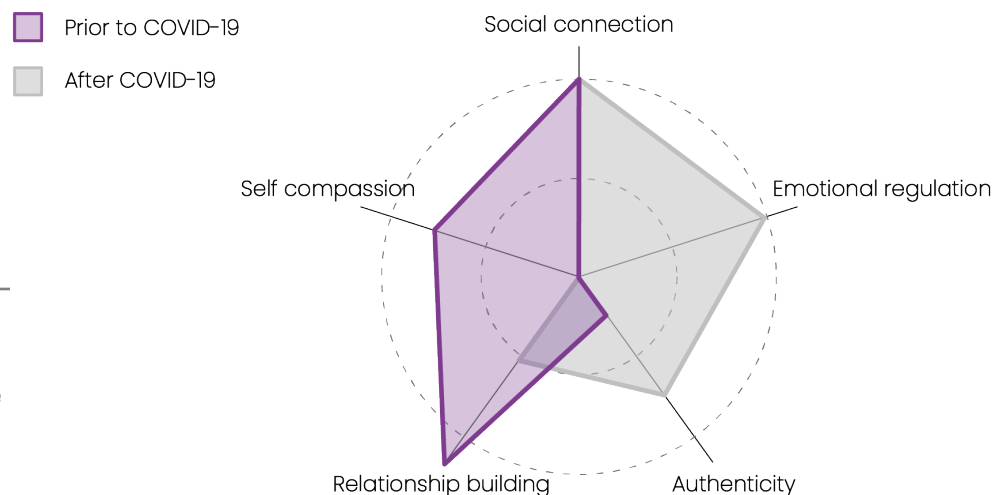


FIGURE 1.2.1

Drivers that predict high sense of belonging, before and during the pandemic, source: BetterUp, 2021

From the graphic, we can see that, during the pandemic, what is driving belonging today, is a healthy state of relationship to others and to self. These data show that to belong, people need to show care and concern for others and care and concern for themselves, to be, consequently, accepted by others.

What is compelling about the fact that relationship building, social connection and self-acceptance are driving belonging, is that this trend is shifting the focus on the individual. This means that, at the basis of the sense of belonging there is the necessity of supporting employees in building these individual skills to better relate to others, to the environment and to self.

Employees sense of belonging: a key point to re-establish the connection between people and the workplace

Therefore, it appears that the key to boosting employee’s sense of belonging is to rethink the organizational structure of the work and the role of offices in an employee-centric perspective, creating a workplace environment that is enjoyable, supportive and trustworthy.

How to foster today’s employees sense of belonging?

Considering that the pandemic has pushed the adoption of new working methods, companies must rethink their work organization and the role of offices in ensuring that people enjoy safe, productive, and pleasurable working experience.

There are several actions that companies need to take to re-establish the sense of belonging in adapting their working experience to satisfy these renewed drivers of belonging in this “new normal” reality.

Based on my experience in Accenture as an environmental branding trainee and on the research carried out about the requirements that respond to the sense of belonging; I find it particularly interesting to analyze the strategy of exploiting the physical presence of the company to optimize its sense of recognition and identification and communicate a sense of stability to their employees, offering them a safe place to stay and in which they can refer to. I think that taking advantage of the physicality of spaces to recover the engagement and the motivation of employees in their workplace could be an effective choice, especially after this long period of detachment.

In support of this hypothesis, I found that in Deloitte’s research (2020) there are three core drivers that are strictly related to the workplace environment and that together can foster the creation of the sense of belonging; these drivers are comfort, connection and contribution.

Which of the following is the biggest driver of creating a sense of belonging in the company?

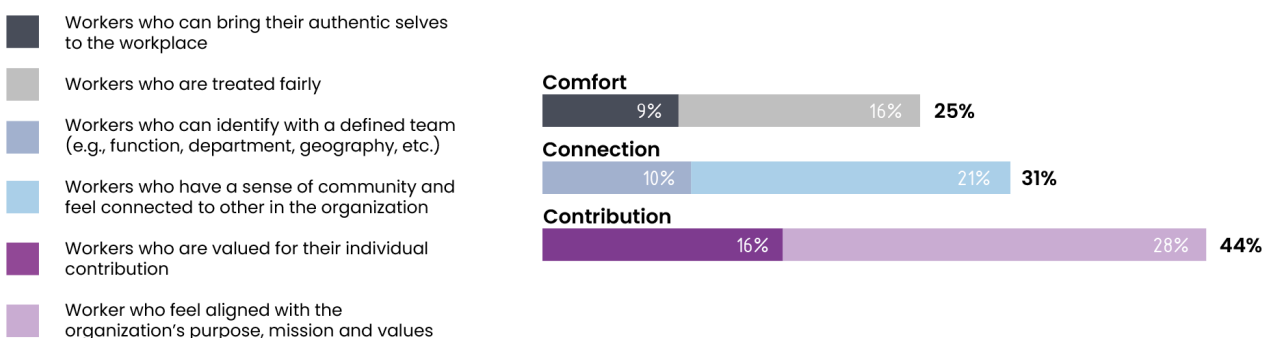


FIGURE 1.2.2 | Belonging: from comfort to connection to contribution, source: Deloitte, 2020

According to the research, the driver of comfort is related to a work environment where employees are treated fairly and where they can bring their authentic selves to work, the connection's driver stands for having a sense of community and identifying with a defined team, while contribution means feeling aligned with the organization's purpose, mission and values and being valued for the individual contributions.

In my opinion, all these drivers, if supported by a strong employee-centred corporate culture, can be enclosed in a single solution: the design of working environments and their branding.

This is a direction that many companies are taking, and that I'm going to deepen and analyse in this research, starting from a case of which I've personally experienced, that of Accenture.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION: FOCUSING ON THE COMPANY'S PHYSICAL PRESENCE

Working as an intern at Accenture I discovered the world of office environmental branding, a corporate communication strategy that aims to invest in the physical presence of its entity on the territory, focusing especially on the representation of its own brand identity through the physical dimension.

Specifically, despite the fact that even before the pandemic, Accenture was already familiar with the hybrid way of working, allowing its employees to alternate between remote work and presence work in the office; it has still decided to put a lot of effort on physical space and on its customization, even though most of its employees do not fully live in the company's office.

Also considering the fact that Accenture's employees don't often use the spaces offered by the company due to their work of consultants, the main role of the Accenture's employees that often takes place at the customers' headquarters.

Therefore, despite the type of work that Accenture offers and the smart directions that the working experience is taking after this pandemic; Accenture had decided to invest in something tightly physical: the construction of 3 buildings with specific interventions dedicated to the study and the design of branding elements for its interior spaces.

This is the reason that prompted me to investigate the motivations that led Accenture to make this choice that seemed, in view of the facts, to go against the digital trend that the office work is potentially taking.

The physicality of the office space and the spatial experience for Accenture

From the Manifesto published in 2021 on Accenture's report *WORK. LEAD. SPACE. Co-creating our Preferred Future*, it is clear how the company considers the maintenance of physical space as a fundamental point to engage their employees, restoring a sense of community.

The Manifesto mentions the importance of the maintenance and re-thinking of the physical spaces in this post-pandemic era, to improve connections between the employees themselves but also to connect them in a cross-company ecosystem. It is written that, in order to drive their engagement, these virtual, physical, hybrid spaces should be reshaped with care: working on the reconnection with the space and its brand purpose in order to stay creative, motivated and united.

Accenture has understood that the future of office space would be different: spatially and organizationally it will be shaped by purpose and context providing possibilities to inspire and to connect with employees, to their work and to the entire ecosystem.

A possible solution: focusing on the company's physical presence

For Accenture, physical offices are much more than just an infinite number of individual anonymous workstations. The office work experience is instead considered as a rich and varied spatial journey made up of sequences, carefully tailored to complement and contrast with one another.

It is in this sense that the representation of spaces, for me, can influence the work experience and favor the alignment between the employees' perception of the purpose of the organization; thus, creating a network of shared knowledge capable of generating recognition, security, and a sense of belonging in employees.

From what I've learned working in the Accenture's environmental branding team, this purpose for improving the employees work experience, can be reached through a combination of indoor environments' studies, graphic and physical elements which are intended to translate into a physical space the visual, the value and the emotional aspects that the company wants to share.

This is what *Environmental Branding* stands for, in the Accenture reality.

02 THE ACCENTURE'S APPROACH: ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING FOR ITS OFFICE

2.1

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING FOR ACCENTURE?

Considering that employees will need to be delighted with new office experiences; the office should be inviting and offer a clearly superior experiences for employees to make them consider returning to a physical office instead of comfortably working from their home.

They will think of the office as a place to fulfill a purpose, to be engaged in social interactions or to access resources and services. Moreover, the office will serve as a platform for collaboration and connections creation.

To meet these needs of engagement and use of spaces, Accenture, is investing its resources in a practice linked more to the physical characterization of spaces: bringing personalization, storytelling and communication directly into the environment.

The environmental branding strategy in Accenture, according to the Accenture Environmental Branding Guidelines (2020) is founded on efficiency, effectiveness, and engagement with the aim of making the work experience in the office more enriching and inspiring.

The primary goal for Accenture to create a dynamic, cohesive environmental experience for its employees, is to strengthen brand recognition by using environmental graphics.

Accenture is used to characterize its offices around the world through the creation of a communication plan based on the arrangement in strategic point of the spaces, of corporate branding elements as the logo, the corporate messages and images following specific guidelines for colours, typography and topics; maintaining this same brand's corporate ethos into its workspaces across the world, it allows to create a sense of connections between Accenture people around the world and a sense of belonging to a one single reality.

Those who usually deal with this kind of branding interventions within the Accenture offices are the so-called "environmental branding teams", of which I was a part as interaction designer during my internship; these interdisciplinary teams are usually made up of experts in the fields of marketing, architecture, communication, graphic and experience design.

To carry out an environmental branding intervention, the team has to go through a long process of realization composed of several steps:

firstly, it has to determine the level of investment; it depends on the type of location, the available budget and the implementation's strategy of the brand communication based on what happens in that specific location, which is the target audience and what messages to convey.

Secondly, the team has to study the journeys of the different types of people who will experience the space, in order to develop a communication strategy, identifying what to communicate to the different audiences along the way.

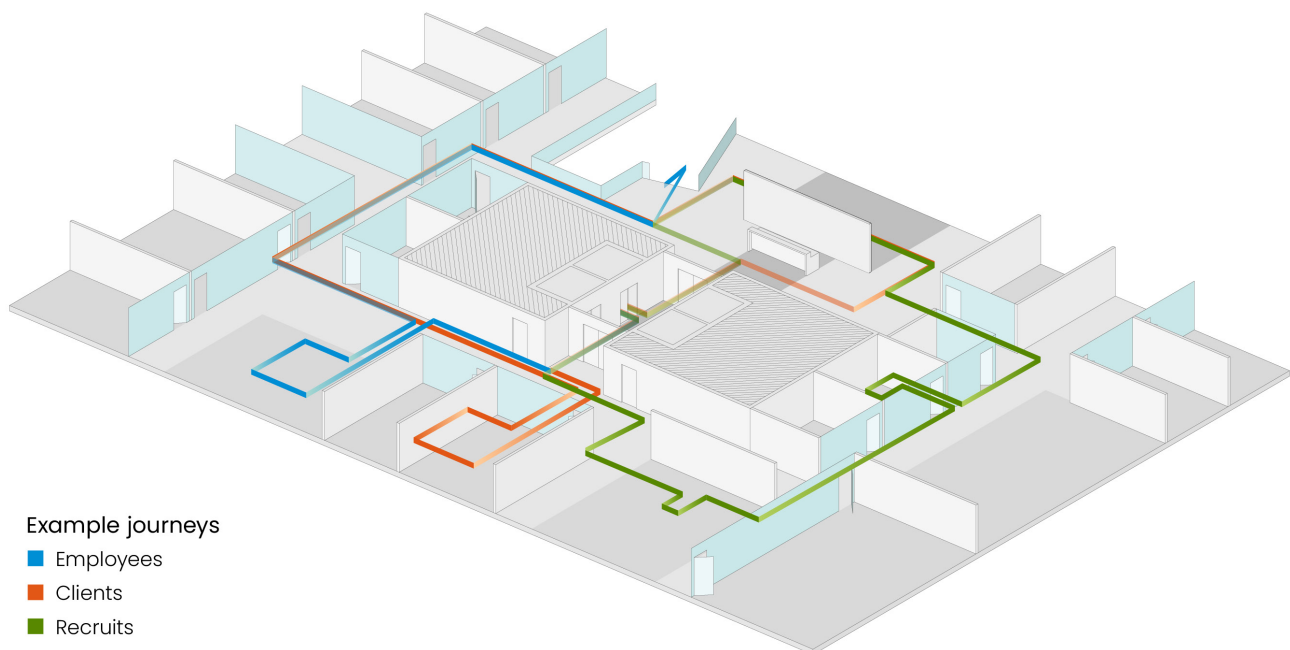


FIGURE 2.1.1 | Example of a flow study scheme, source: Accenture environmental branding guidelines, 2020

Afterwards, it is necessary to conduct a site survey in order to study the technical details of the existing space and the coordination with the existing architectural and interior design projects.

Finally, based on the journeys and the communication strategy planned, the team has to select and identify zones within the space depending on the user's experience sequence, in order to select the most effective brand expression opportunities points.

What is environmental branding for Accenture?

- 1. ARRIVE**
Welcome visitors to Accenture, taking cues from high-end hospitality.
- 2. DISRUPT**
Start with something unexpected and visionary; inspire visitors from the first moment.
- 3. EXPERIENCE**
Introduction to the Accenture capabilities tailored for the location.
- 4. SHARE**
Clients can settle in and begin to talk openly about their challenges and opportunities.
- 5. COLLABORATE**
Present capabilities, brainstorm, and ambitiously explore applications to the client's business.
- 6. EXCEL**
Visit functioning offices and get to know the talent.
- 7. WRAP UP**
A memorable, creative takeaway moment.
- 8. SPARK**
Places where person-to-person interactions happen and ideas can be exchanged.

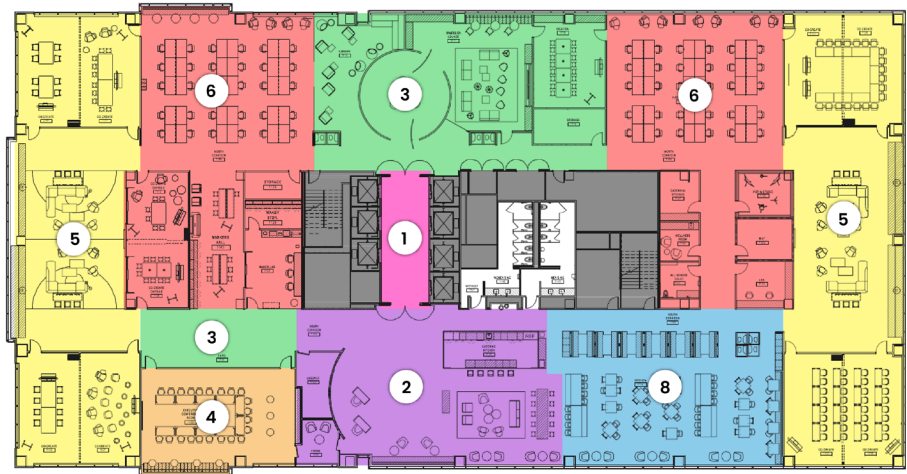


FIGURE 2.1.2 | Example of zone identification plan in which every area is identified as part of a specific sequence in the experience journey, source: Accenture environmental branding guidelines, 2020

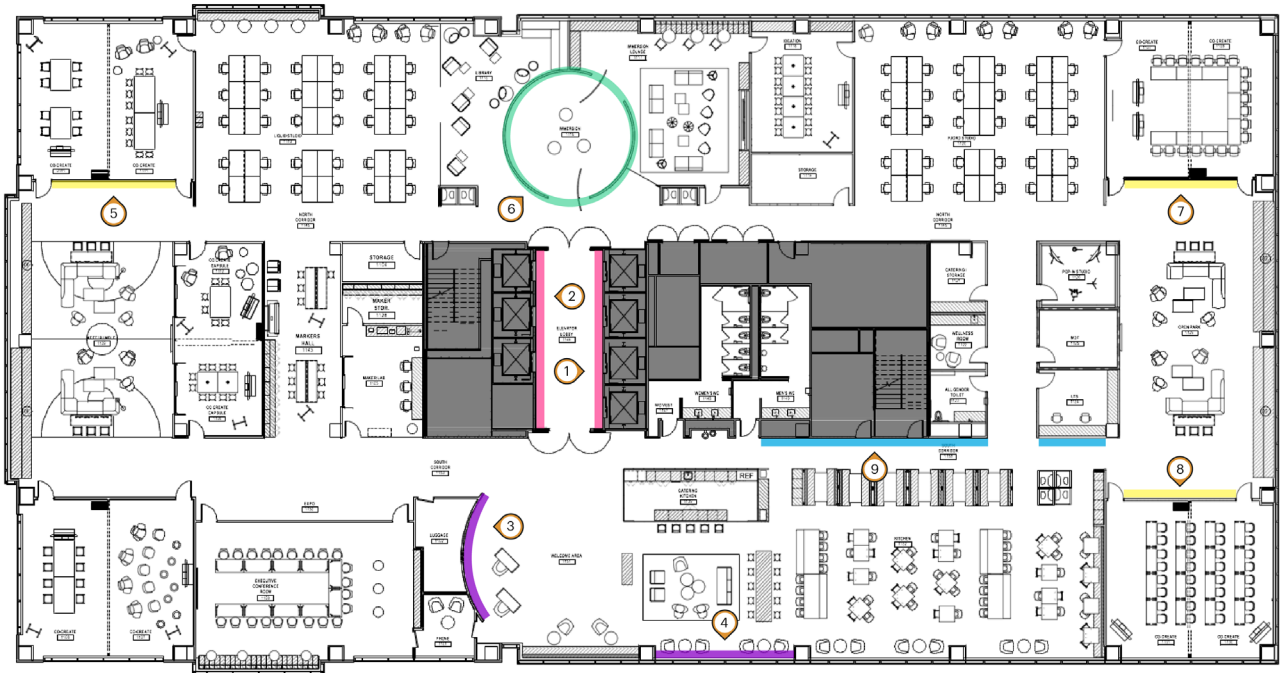


FIGURE 2.1.3 | Example of brand expression opportunities identification that describe where brand moments can best fit and help bring the journeys to life, source: Accenture environmental branding guidelines, 2020

2.2

AN ACCENTURE ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING CASE

An example of the development of an entire environmental branding process can be seen in the realization of the branding project for Accenture Torino Lingotto's office implemented between March and October 2021, which I personally handled by the early stages: from the definition of the communication strategy to the effective implementation.

In recent times Accenture has renewed the communication guidelines of its visual identity at a global level, updating its vision, mission, and care awareness; thus, activating a wave of branding updates in all the offices around the world, one of these was Turin's office.

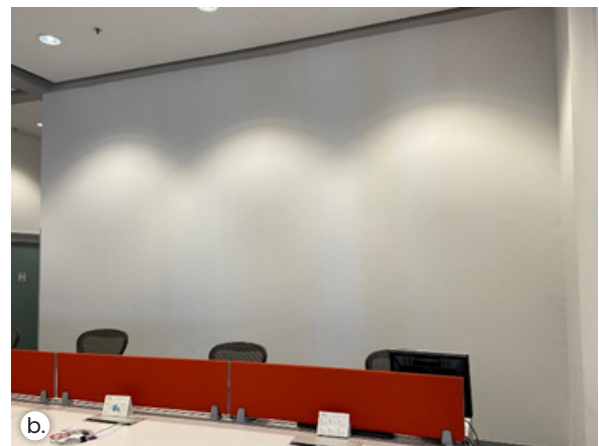
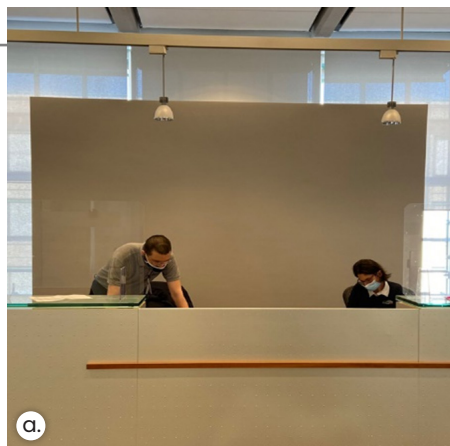
Therefore, starting from the need to renew the communicative and visual aspect of an office that had already existing elements, it was necessary to understand how to integrate these branding elements in a coherent and effective way.

The first step was to visit the office, collect photos to detect the mood of the spaces and take the first measurements.

FIGURE 2.2.1

Collection of photos of the site inspection April 2021, Torino Lingotto Accenture Office

In the order:
a. reception
b. workstation wall
c. folding door wall
d. curved wall



Through the inspection, it was possible to define the identity and the functionality of each space in order to organize and implement a communication strategy consistent with the space and the people to which it refers.

Specifically, this office is an Accenture Automotive Industry Solution Center, that is, a location that hosts employees and clients who work mostly in the automotive sector, where the space is divided into two areas: one dedicated to a more conventional type of office work, while the other called "Innovation Hub", offers spaces dedicated to design thinking, immersive demonstration areas and interactive digital surfaces, as well as areas where customers can co-create together a specialized team for the development of new solutions.

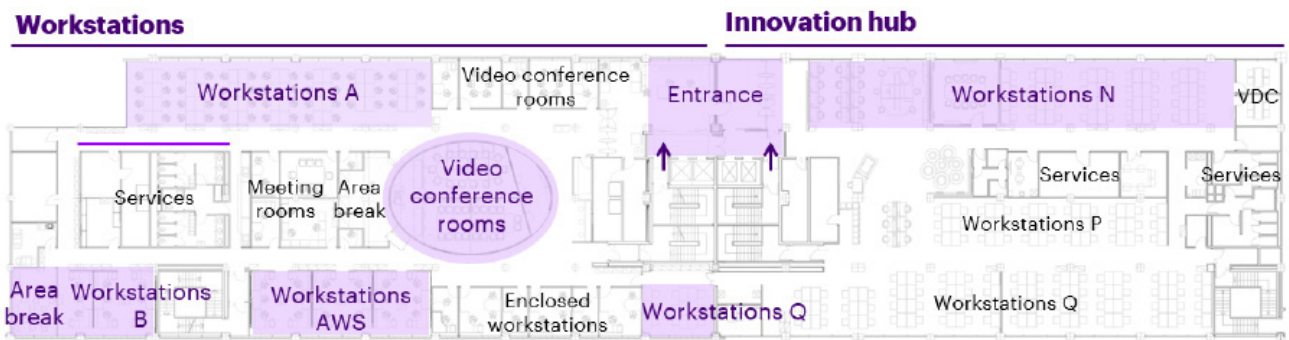


FIGURE 2.2.2 | Space organization study, Torino Lingotto Accenture Office

Subsequently, it was necessary to define the experience sequence which describes the flow of the uses of the spaces in order to identify potentially suitable opportunities and locations for brand moments.

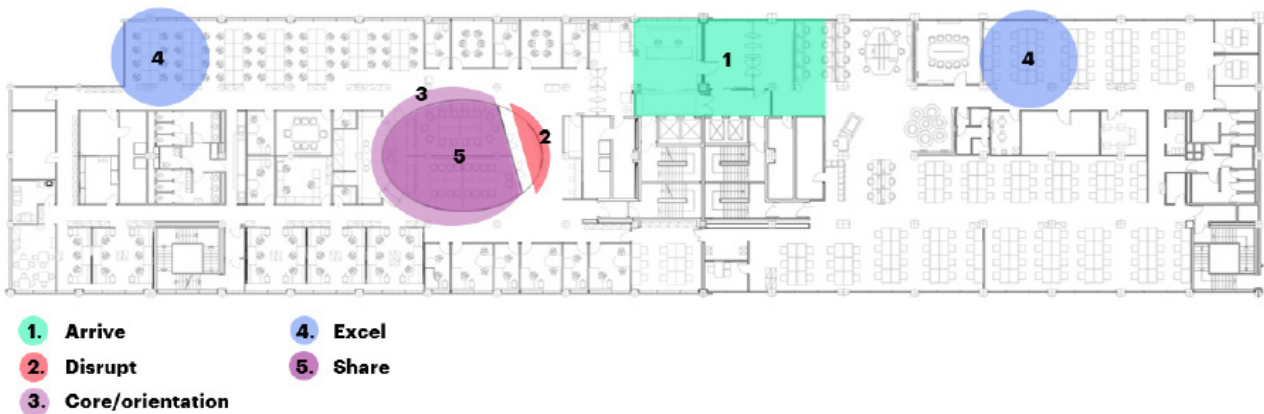


FIGURE 2.2.3 | Brand expression opportunities identification, Torino Lingotto Accenture Office

After identifying the areas of interest, the next step was to identify zones within the plan based on the experience sequence and determine all the specific effectual touchpoints through which to convey every element of communication that will be designed to measure.

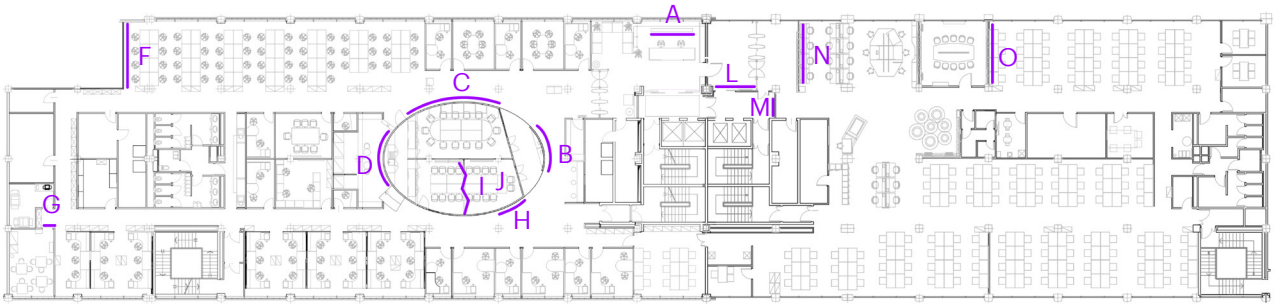


FIGURE 2.2.4 | Definition of the touchpoints through which to convey a tailored communication moment, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project

Specifically, for each point deemed of interest to convey messages, the user's point of view and the level of importance that the point was assuming in the space was analysed.

Below, there is a collection of examples of navigation maps to demonstrate the interaction between the visitor and the points of interest chosen for the branding moments.

FIGURE 2.2.5

User navigation map for the "Excel" moment, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project



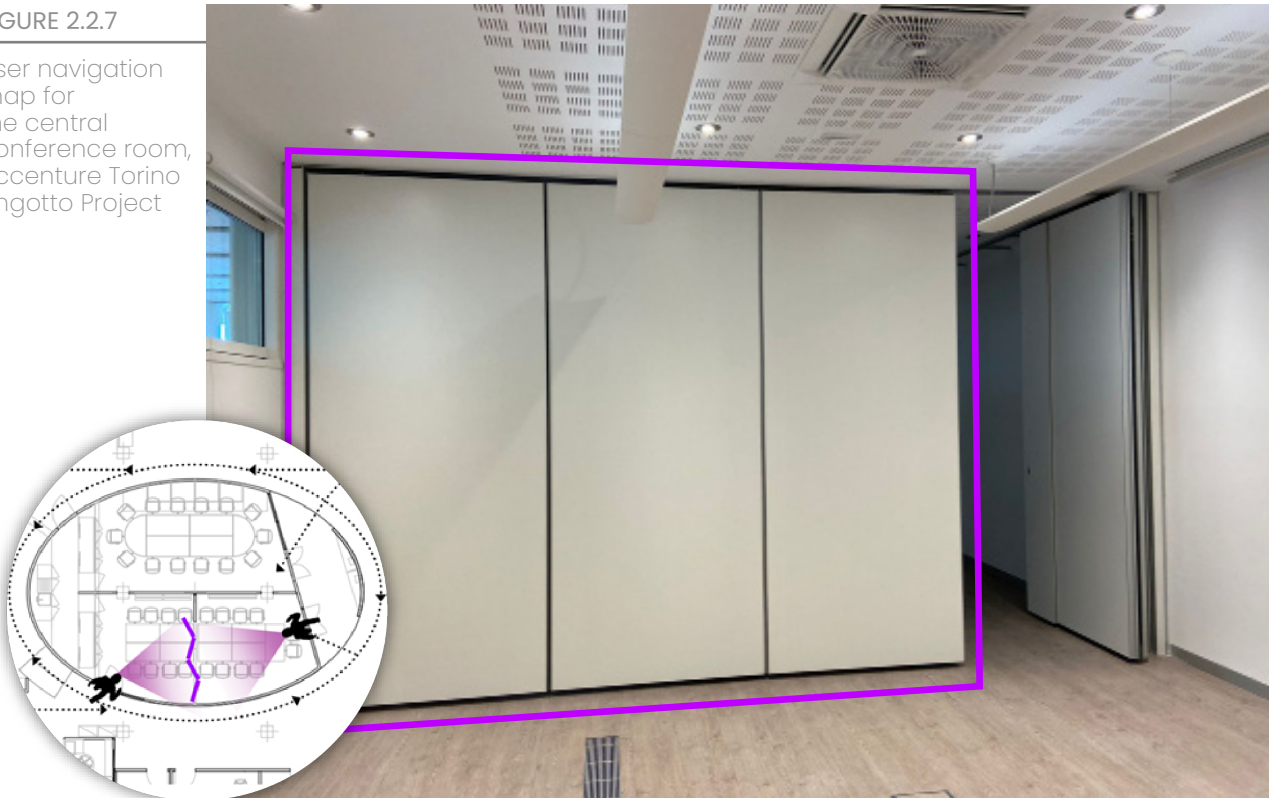
FIGURE 2.2.6

User navigation map for the “Core” moment, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project



FIGURE 2.2.7

User navigation map for the central conference room, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project



Finally, after these studies on the experience points definition, all the brand moments identified should be defined by designing the materiality, the colour, the messaging, and the graphics of each element.

In particular, in the area defined as the “arrival” moment, in the space dedicated to the reception, it was decided to place a material logo element in order to introduce the visitors into a well-defined identity space.



FIGURE 2.2.8 | Reception after the branding operation - photo taken in December 2021, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project

In particular, in the area defined as the “core” of the environment it was decided to place a graphic element specifically tailored for the location that was disruptive enough to introduce the visitor into the space with something unexpected and evocative to draw their attention into the space from the first moment and make the location easily memorable.

Specifically, for this area it was decided to create an illustration that represented the skyline of Turin, the city where the office is located. Giving this central part of the environment such a strong identification, it made navigation and orientation in the entire space easier, taking into consideration the strong recognisability of this element around which the whole environment revolves.



FIGURE 2.2.9 | Turin skyline's illustration created for the central body of the office - photo taken in December 2021, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project

The communication strategy used within the entire office in the remaining points of interest selected to express brand moments, was designed respecting the identity and the functionality of each space; recalling the themes of industry, automotive and innovation of which this location is a promoter.



FIGURE 2.2.10

Branding element created by recalling the materials present in the environment - photo taken in December 2021, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project

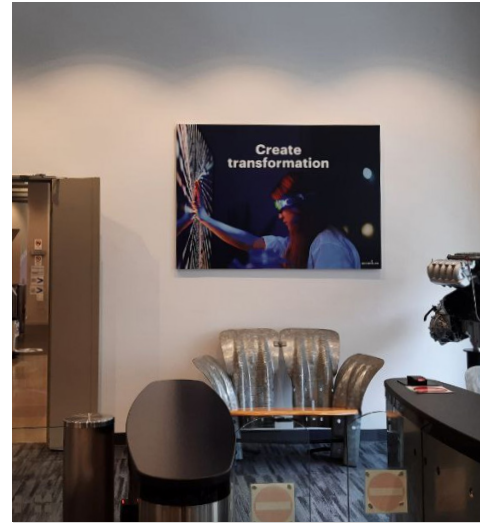


FIGURE 2.2.11 | Collection of photos taken after the project has been completed, December 2021, Accenture Torino Lingotto Project

CAN THE ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING PRACTICE BE EFFECTIVE TO STRENGTHEN EMPLOYEES' SENSE OF BELONGING IN THE WORKPLACE?

In light of what we have seen in the Accenture environmental branding approach; to answer the opening question about the effectiveness of this practice in strengthening the employees' sense of belonging to workplace, in the next chapter, a collection of case studies relating to the topic will be presented with the aim of showing how companies are dealing with the issue of the sense of belonging through physical spaces.

Subsequently, through the analysis of the case studies; the values, the principles and the objectives that define the environmental branding practice for offices will be extracted, outlining the processes and motivations that support its implementation.

In the end, comparing the knowledge drawn from the research with the experience lived as an interaction designer in the environmental branding team at Accenture, a concept scenario proposal will be suggested and discussed with the Accenture's environmental branding team in order to see the level of understanding and effectiveness that a new direction based on a digital interaction strategy can offer to Accenture environmental branding's approach.

03 OFFICE'S ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING AND SENSE OF BELONGING

3.1 OFFICE'S ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING AND SENSE OF BELONGING: A CASE STUDY COLLECTION

To understand how other companies are moving in relation to the theme of strengthening the sense of belonging through physical spaces; in this chapter, a series of case studies of existing environmental branding projects made by other companies will be explored and analysed in order to better understand what this discipline is about and subsequently understand how this practice can actually foster the sense of belonging of employees within the work environment.

3.1.1 CASE STUDY I ATlassian AUSTIN HEADQUARTERS Spreading the local culture through the company's brand



FIGURE 3.1.1 | The T-Shirt Wall, Atlassian Office Austin, Colorado

Client summary

Atlassian is an Australian based software company that develops products for software developers, project managers, and content management.

Context of the environmental branding project

Atlassian chose to develop an integrated branding program that supported the corporate branding in its offices built in 2014 in Austin, Colorado. The company embarked on this branding program with the goal of representing the local culture; therefore, every graphics element and signage have been designed and developed to enhance the employee experience and strengthen workplace pride in relation to the local culture.

The design process

At the beginning of the project, designers went directly to Austin just to hang out and absorb the local culture, interviewing stakeholders and living the local experience. This effort resulted in an environmental branding project that perfectly combine the corporate and the community culture with the aim of making their enterprise software company feel more personal. This strategy aligned employees with their company culture and, in turn, aligned their company to the local culture. They wanted to instil pride in their employees and make each corporate office feel entirely unique.



FIGURE 3.1.2 | Interactive Wall for company's culture spread, Atlassian Office Austin, Colorado

The environmental branding strategy: create cultural expression points to share the identity uniqueness of the location

The office branding campaign took plenty of inspiration from the local culture of Atlassian's new Austin location; one of the examples of this creative mix of elements that reflect the local culture is the so-called "Custom Bike ID" ; which is an identifying element made like a piece of art that wants to represent symbolically the large amount of cyclists who cross Austin's downtown area. Atlassian replied to the local way of life with a one-of-a-kind solution for identifying bike storage: a large sign built out of a bicycle seat and handlebars.

FIGURE 3.1.3

The Custom Bike ID, Atlassian Office Austin, Colorado



The environmental branding strategy: provide different ways to make people interact, express and inspire the community

The "Look What I Found" shelf touchpoint is instead related to the many Atlassian employees in Austin who are used to travel. They have the habit of collecting colourful souvenirs from all around the world and displaying them proudly throughout the office. An open wall display centered with the words "Look What I Found" and surrounded by enough shelf space for staff to showcase their findings, was part of the new environmental branding designs.

FIGURE 3.1.4

Front drawing of the "Look What I Found" shelf, Atlassian Office Austin, Colorado



Another interesting environmental branding touchpoint for sharing and interacting with the local community can be seen in the "Marquee Message Board": when Atlassian workers and guests exit the elevator and enter Atlassian space, they are greeted with a large marquee message board. Leadership utilizes this place to share news and welcome workers and guests, inspired by Austin's music venues and marquees culture: everyone is guaranteed to notice this dynamic, ever-changing signage.

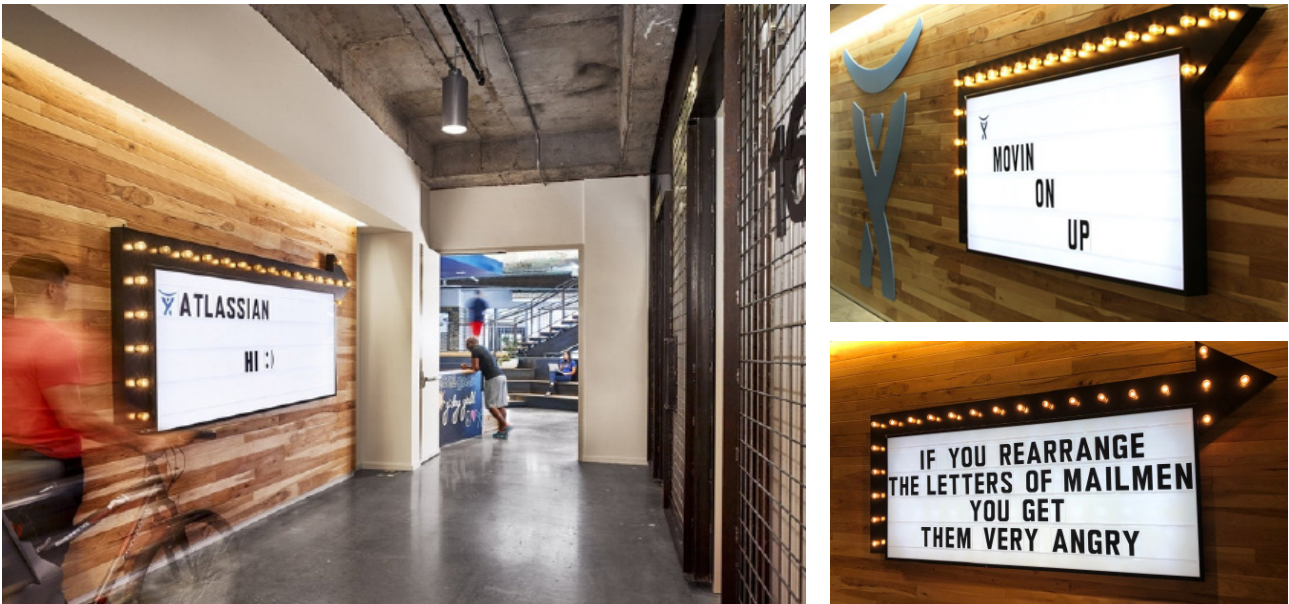


FIGURE 3.1.5 | Collection of photos that shows the "Marquee Message Board", Atlassian Office Austin, Colorado

The environmental branding goals: identity recognition, self expression and interaction

Through a mix of disruptive elements and cultural expression points, the branding intervention designed for this space has led to an iconic representation of the local cultural uniqueness of the location in which the office is hosted.

Offering the people a place of reconnection with the local identity and providing them points of cultural and artistic expression, they can now live a more enriching and inspiring work experience, favored by an interactive and customized use of the space.

The environmental branding project of this case study responds to clear objectives: the communication of a single cultural identity in which people can identify and refer to and the facilitation of interaction and connection with the community and local culture through points of self and cultural expression.

These points, if referred to the research on the sense of belonging seen in the previous chapters, go to confirm how through various environmental branding strategies, such as cultural spreading and self expression points, the sense of belonging of the employee at the workplace can be supported.

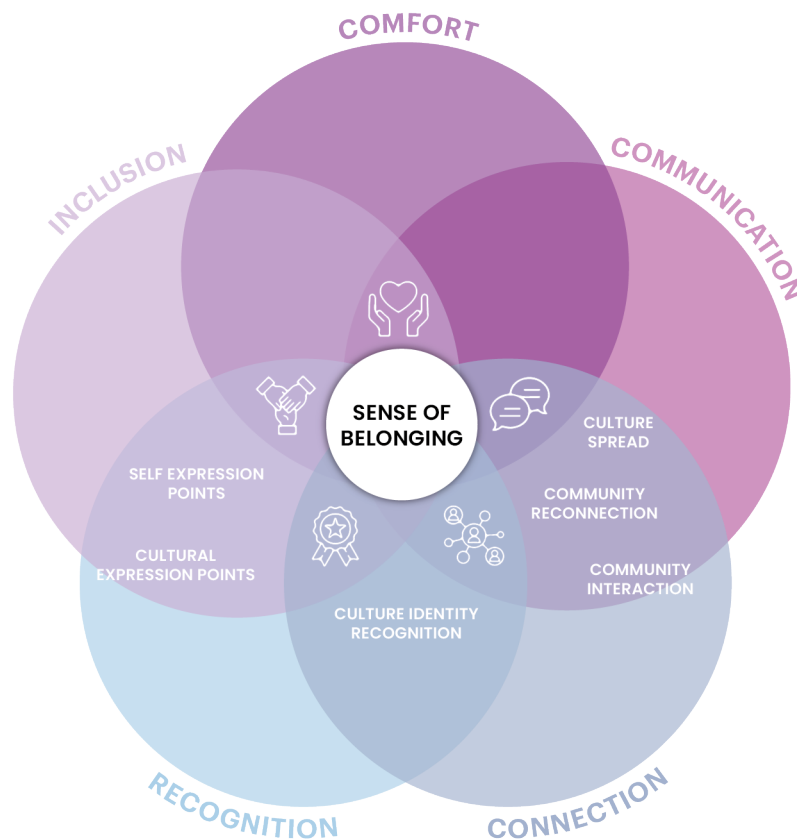
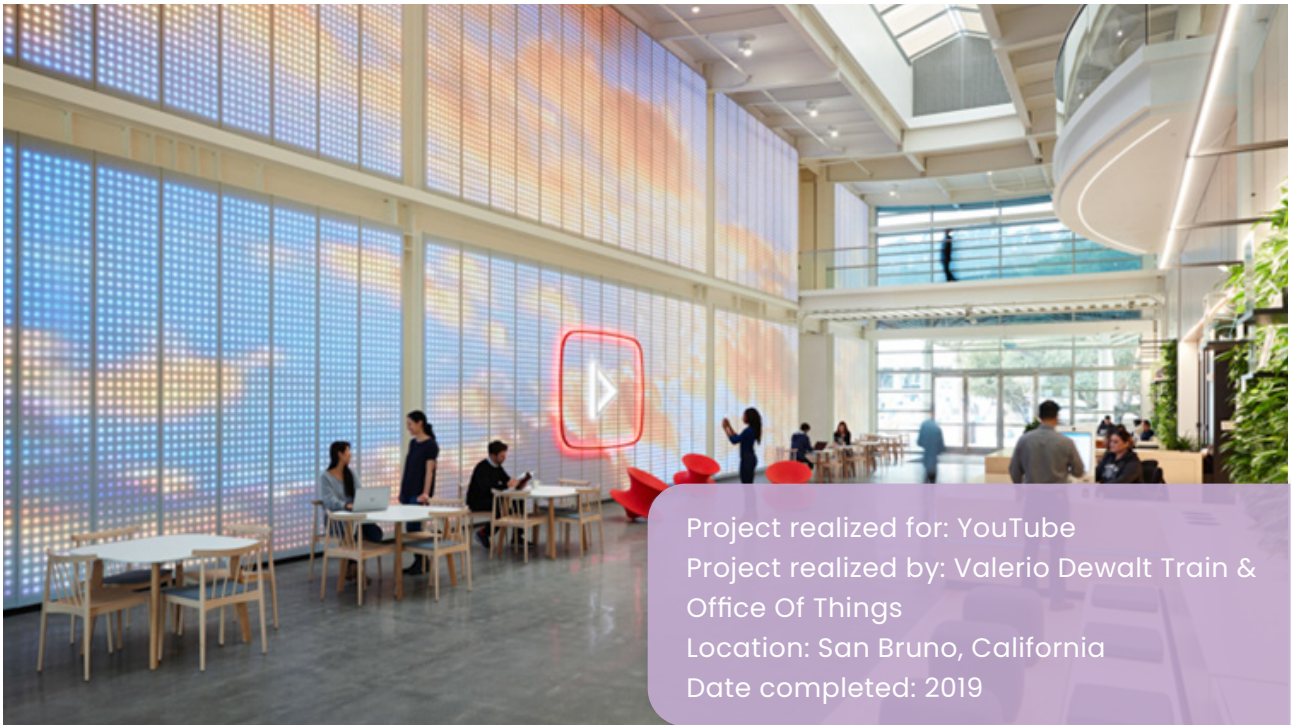


FIGURE 3.1.6 | How Atlassian's environmental branding strategy supports sense of belonging

3.1.2 CASE STUDY II

YOUTUBE 901 CHERRY LOBBY

A Layer of digital media and interactivity to enhance connection between the company's community



Project realized for: YouTube
 Project realized by: Valerio Dewalt Train & Office Of Things
 Location: San Bruno, California
 Date completed: 2019

FIGURE 3.1.7 | Lounge, YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby, photo by Mariko Reed

Client summary

YouTube is a web 2.0 platform, founded in 2005, which allows the sharing and viewing of multimedia content on the network, it also allows creators with a high user margin to obtain a cash reward in exchange for sponsorship. Today the platform boasts 2 billion active users worldwide and a large community of famous content creators.

Context of the environmental branding project

YouTube found that the old lobby was out of step with the current brand and did not reflect the vibrancy of its workplace culture. The space needed to be welcoming, adaptable, and a versatile showcase not just for the brand, but also for the work of the YouTube's 2 billion users.

The design process

A series of visioning sessions with project stakeholders led to design principles that would dictate the outcome of the new lobby.

To begin, the first objective was to design a memorable experience that inspire visitors and highlight their arrival at the company headquarters. Second, integrate iconic and share worthy branding to encourage user participation with social media. Third, include multipurpose functionality and optimal flow so that the space can be used for both events and day-to-day business operations. Finally, provide a canvas for creators to display their work on a large scale.

The environmental branding strategy: a layer of interactivity creates an unexpected experience

In the 901 Cherry's double-height atrium, visitors are now greeted with a floor-to-ceiling digital installation. The panels are lighted by LEDs that are distributed and covered with soft acoustic fabric that is placed a few inches in front of the screen, catching the light shape of a circle. Rather than adding a cutting-edge screen to display content, the installation is treated as an art piece, an abstraction of a screen that shows individual pixels. Instead of the cold plastic materials typically used in technological products, the soft fabric feels inviting and warm to the touch.

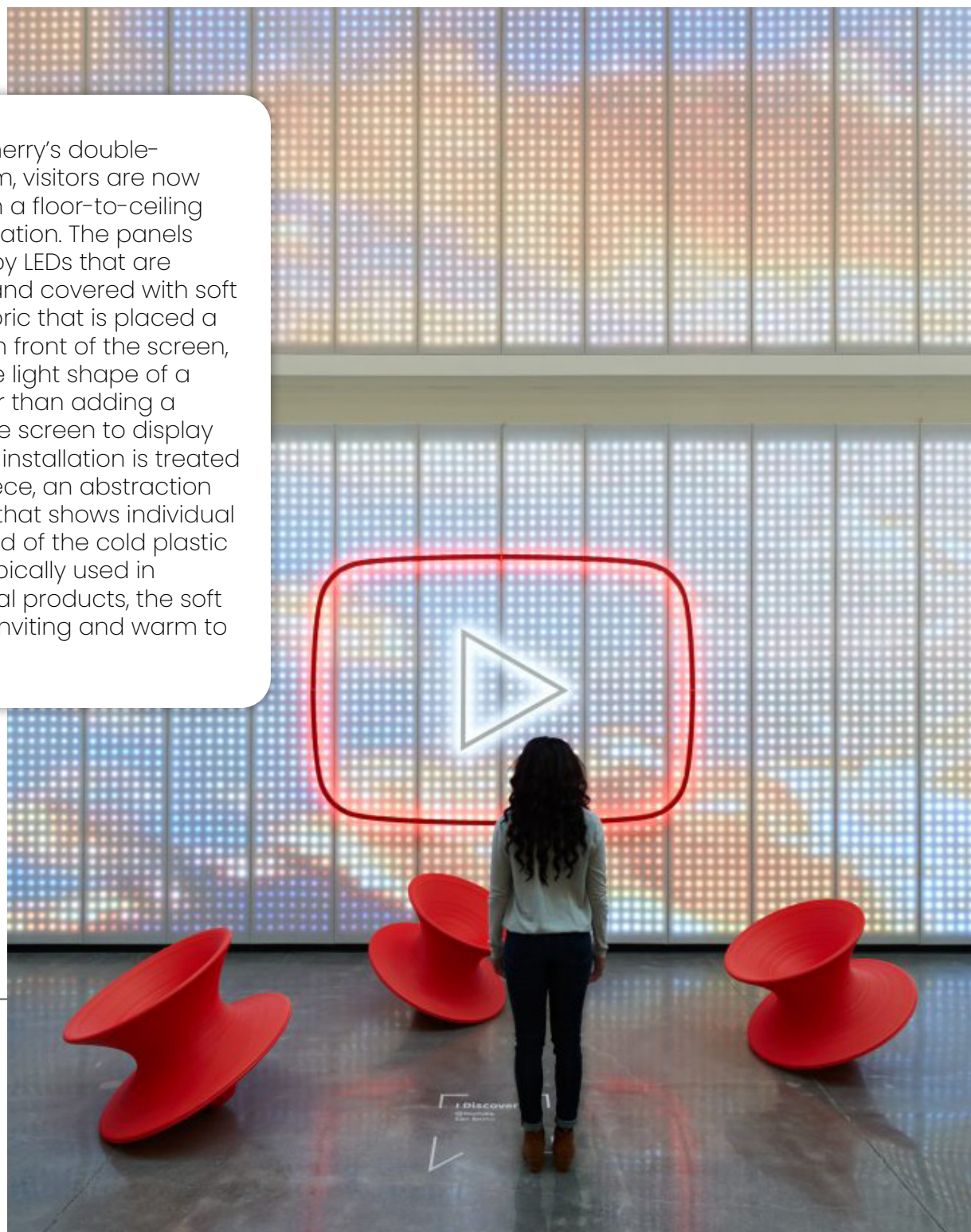


FIGURE 3.1.8

Interactive Wall,
YouTube 901
Cherry Lobby,
photo by Mariko
Reed

A series of floor “medallions” are spread throughout the lobby, encouraging visitors to interact with the digital installation. Each medallion bears a graphic that describes one of YouTube’s core values. Standing on a medallion triggers a reaction on the digital wall. Activating multiple medallions in different combinations gets different responses, inviting visitors to work together to learn how the medallions function. Much like YouTube’s platform, the lobby is designed to foster creativity, exploration and discovery, at the same time as celebrating the company’s content creators and employees.

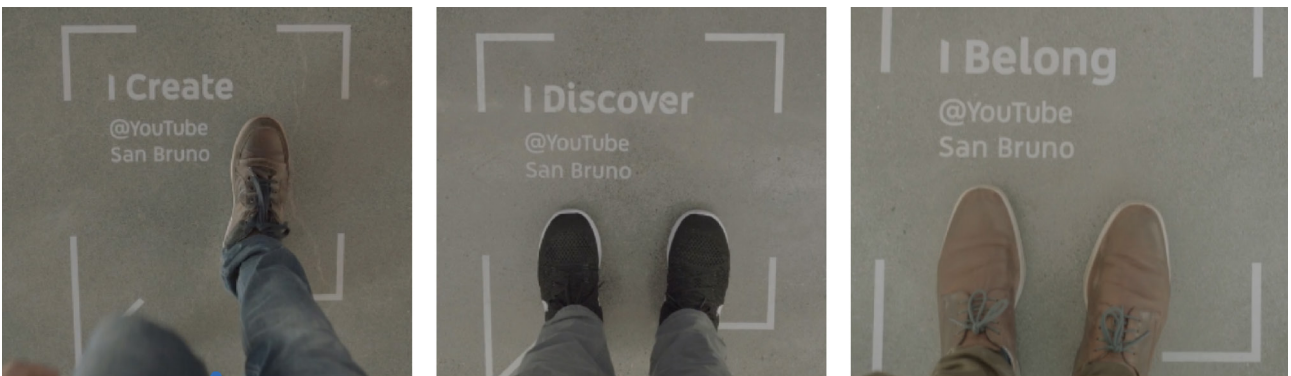


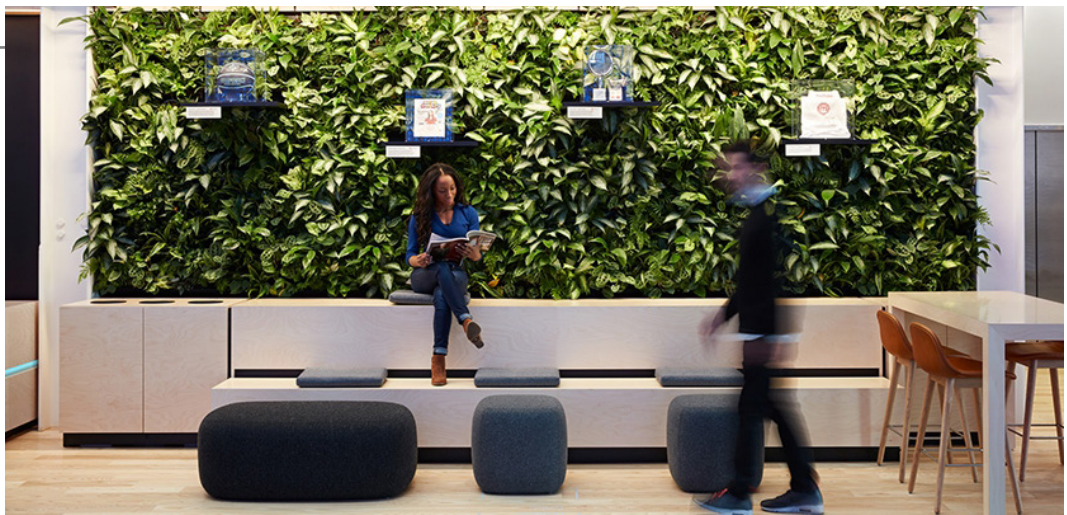
FIGURE 3.1.9 || “Medallions”, YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby, photo by Mariko Reed

The environmental branding strategy: discover Youtube’s community moments with the memorabilia exhibition

On the opposite side of the space there is a green wall with stacked wooden benches. This mix of biophilic elements that supports employee well-being, and the natural wood textures integrated in the space, help to create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. Between the leaves of the green wall, there are hanging glass cases from YouTube’s “Artifact Museum”, which displays a series of objects that were donated by famous Youtube creators, this wall is intended to share with the community successful moments reached by the company as viral videos, collaborations and the variety of field areas of communication covered on the platform.

FIGURE 3.1.10

Green Wall with Youtube’s memorabilia, YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby, photo by Mariko Reed



The environmental branding goals: welcome, inspire and engage

The new lobby was designed with natural materials, simple design, and multi-purpose use in mind. The ambition to integrate a layer of digital media and interactivity into the architectural finishes, to create an engaging mix of technology and warm materials, was at the base of the design principles. This integration of physical and digital space became a fitting symbolic gesture for the headquarters of a digital media company like YouTube.

The designers pay attention to represent in this space the creative and innovative spirit that the company embraces, creating a multi-purpose use space in which people can experience Youtube's world: a welcoming, inspirational and engaging environment that encourages the participation of visitors and the interaction with the company's community of creators.

Also in this case study we can see how key points of the project such as encouraging interaction, participation and recognition of a community are extremely interesting points to satisfy the sense of belonging of the users of that space.

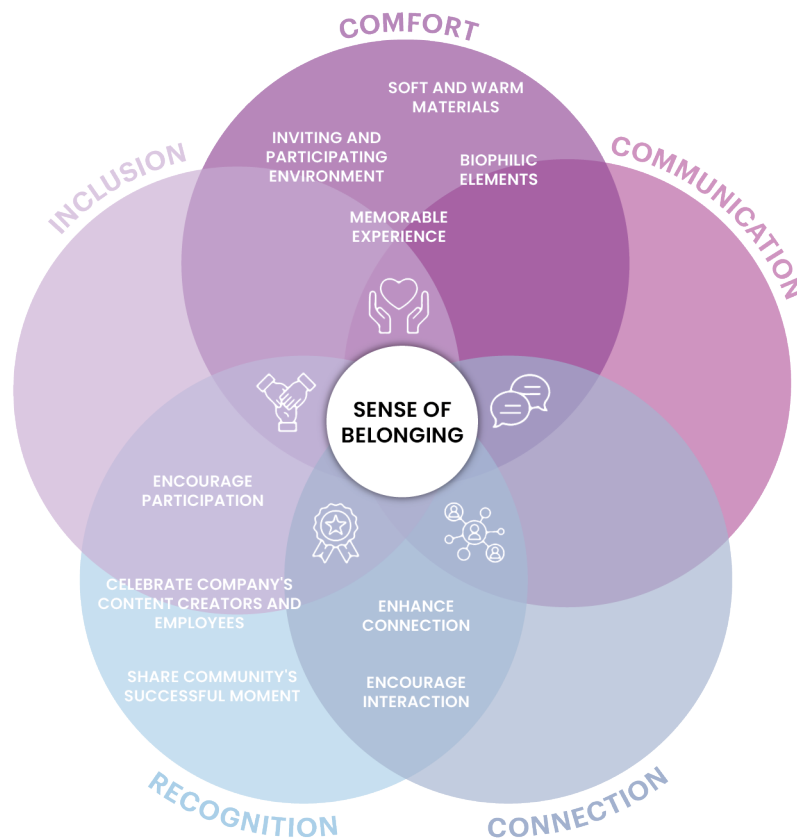


FIGURE 3.1.11 | How YouTube's environmental branding strategy supports sense of belonging

3.1.3 CASE STUDY III

TERRELL PLACE LOBBY

Walls that move, respond and acknowledge your presence



FIGURE 3.1.12 | Main Lobby, Terrell Place Lobby, 2016

Client summary

Terrell Place is one of Washington DC's most legendary properties, an office building with 425,000 square feet of office space, including retail space, premium amenities, captivating views and natural light.

Context of the environmental branding project

Terrell Place in downtown Washington, D.C., is an office and retail complex comprised of three connected components, resulting in a disjointed ground floor lobby. When Beacon Capital acquired the property, they tasked ESI Design with creating a more harmonious interior and a contemporary, exciting work destination.

The design process and strategy

The principal design request was that to transform the lobby experience enhancing the legendary building's distinct sense of place in a way that it could creatively engage and welcome employees and visitors.

ESI designers transformed the space by treating it as a single media canvas. They seamlessly integrated 1,700-square-foot of motion-activated LED displays into the architectural surfaces, creating an ever-changing artwork that captures the bustling pulse of the building enhancing a sense of place that reacts to the presence of people.

The diffused LED displays in the lobbies and corridor are activated by passers-by through a system composed of infrared cameras, creating dynamic and responsive scenes.

This reactive installation transforms the site's common areas and expansive first floor lobby space into an interactive display of 'digital nature'.

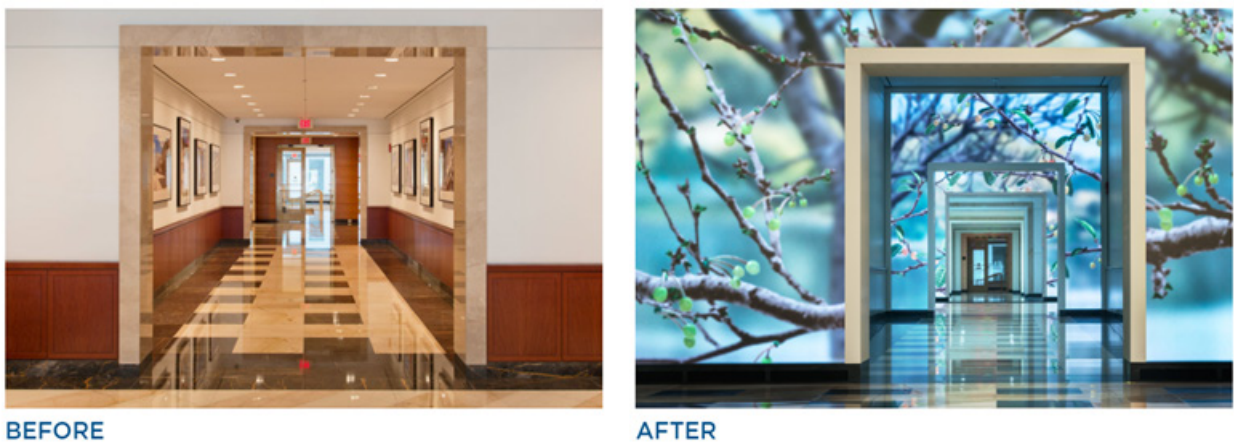


FIGURE 3.1.13 | Before and after the branding intervention, Terrell Place Lobby, 2016

The three displays created by ESI design changes from 'seasons' to 'colour play' and 'cityscape', presenting a selection of scenes that can be programmed with varying durations and sequences. These customizations ensure that passers-by never see the same scene, even if they arrive and leave at the same time every day. When the scene is set on 'season' mode, the media displays the lifecycle of Washington DC's iconic cherry trees.

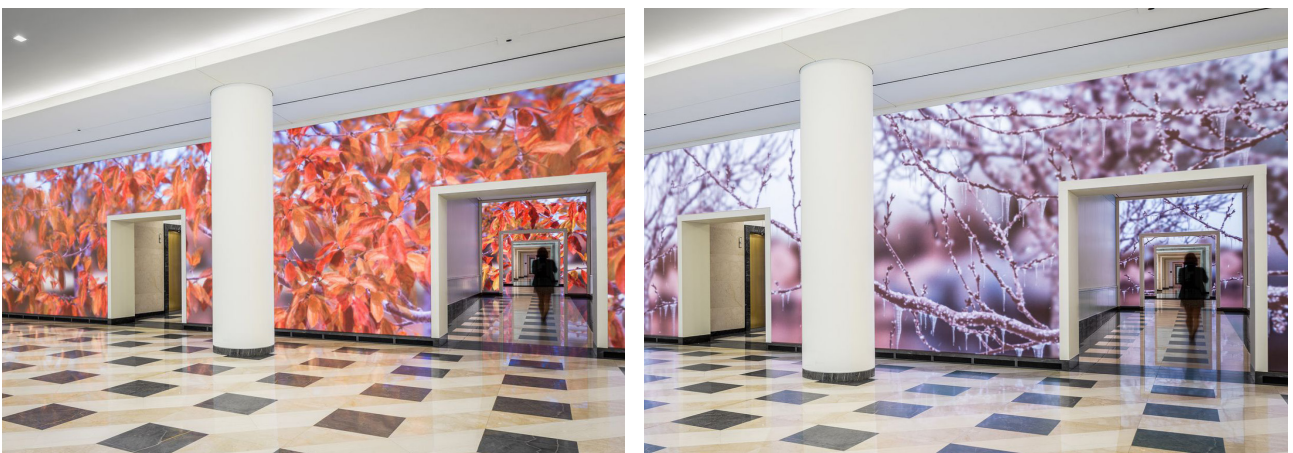


FIGURE 3.1.14 | Interactive media wall set on "season" mode showing respectively autumn and winter, Terrell Place Lobby, 2016

When the 'colour play' scene is set, it shows patterns of multi-colour threads, generated by an algorithm, which spread across the walls, weaving an interactive tapestry that echoes the ever-changing activity of Terrell Place.

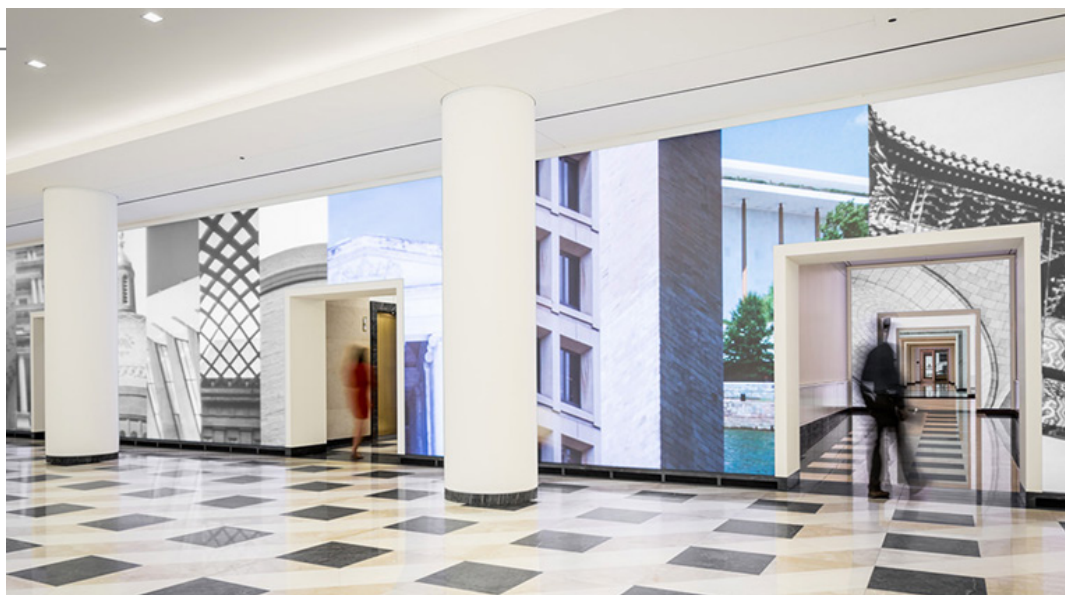


FIGURE 3.1.15 | Interactive media wall set on "colour-play" mode, Terrell Place Lobby, 2016

While the scenario of 'city scape' is been created to celebrate the city in which the building is hosted with iconic architecture, statuary and transportation scenes that are brought to life by people passing by.

FIGURE 3.1.16

Interactive media wall set on "city-scape" mode, Terrell Place Lobby, 2016



Furthermore, in the main hallway, the immersive experience is enhanced by ambient sounds that reflect tones from nature, the surrounding city, and music.

The environmental branding goals: offer a unique and dynamic experience, welcome and engage

This installation allowed Terrell Place to have a unique identity representation and a strong street presence, in fact, the large-scale installation with all its images and movements, can be clearly seen through the oversized windows that look out onto the street.



FIGURE 3.1.17 | External view of the interactive media wall, Terrell Place Lobby, 2016

Each of the media scenes reflects the time of day and the movement of people through the lobby, acting almost as a large abstract data-visualization of the presence and the flow of people in Terrell Place.

Analyzing this case study from the point of view of the sense of belonging, it is highlighted how this is supported by the company's desire to welcome the user, make him live a memorable experience through the recognition of the presence of the individual within the space, thus enhancing every single entity and its interaction.

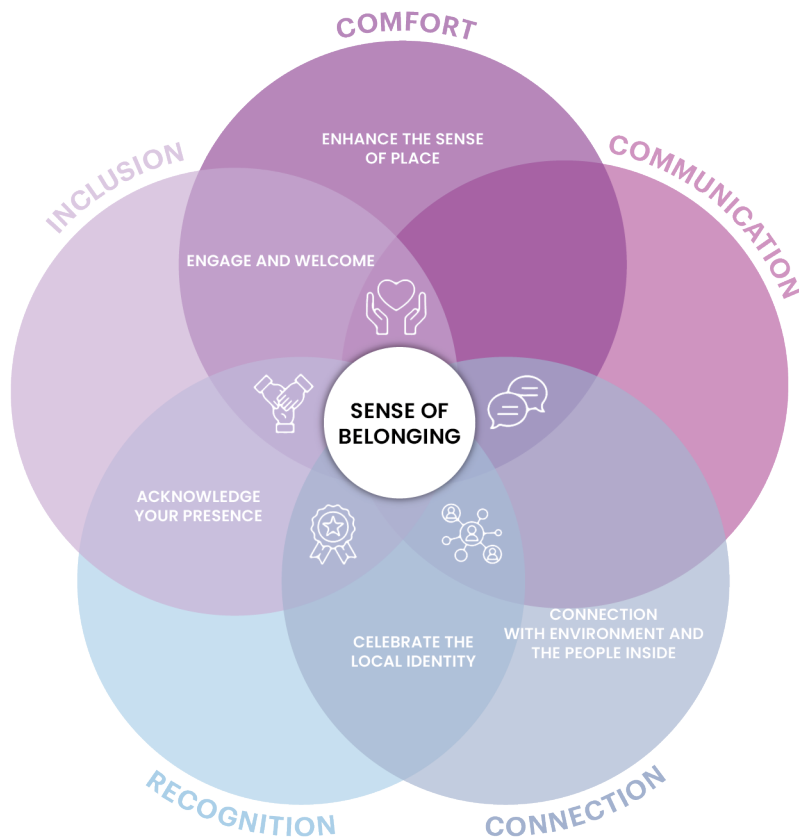
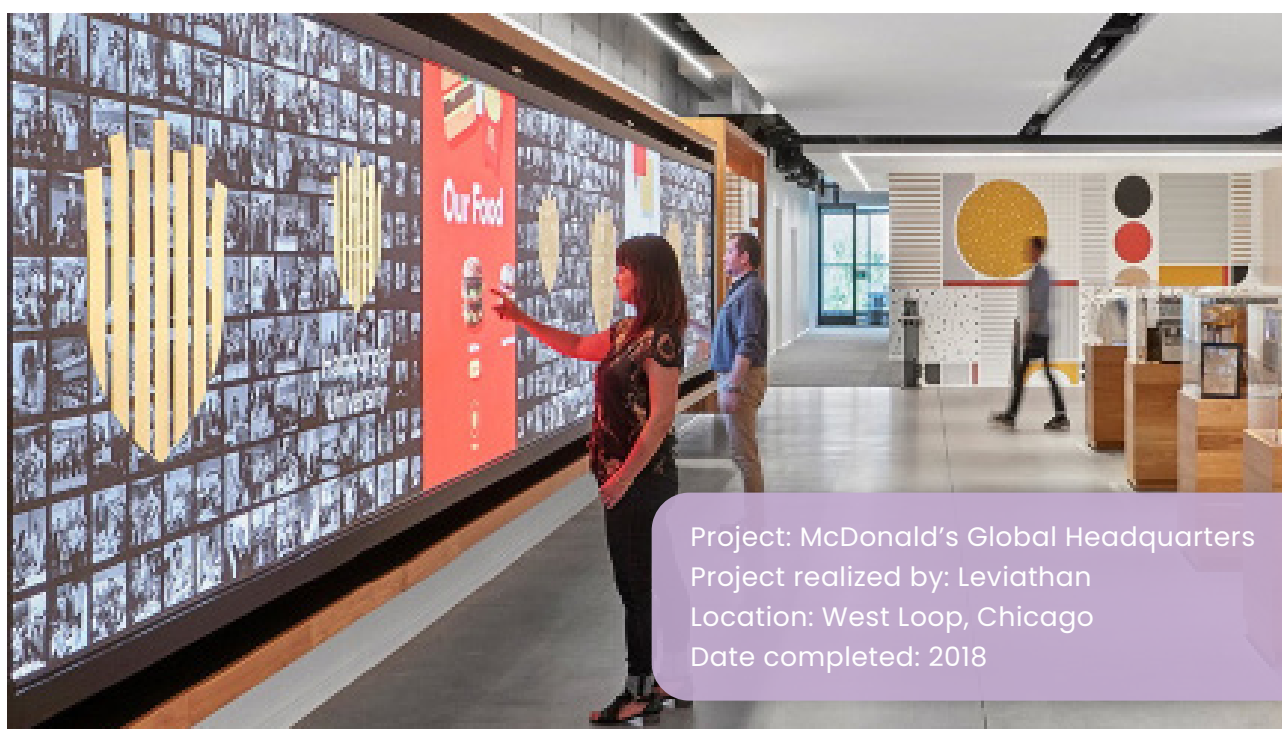


FIGURE 3.1.18 | How Terrell Place's environmental branding strategy supports sense of belonging

3.1.4 CASE STUDY IV

MCDONALD'S GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS

Digitally transforming the global epicentre of an iconic brand



Project: McDonald's Global Headquarters
 Project realized by: Leviathan
 Location: West Loop, Chicago
 Date completed: 2018

FIGURE 3.1.19 | Interactive wall, McDonald's Global Headquarters, 2018

Client summary

For McDonald's executives, employees and visitors alike, the new Global Headquarters should represent an ambitious, globally minded company with a bold vision for a sustainable future, a constant appetite for talent, and daily commitments to educational, charitable and social causes. To capitalize on the richness of its history, its initiatives, and its ever-expanding human capital, the company's chose Leviathan to design the new Global Headquarter through a unique digital offering.

Context of the environmental branding project

As a consummate industry leader, McDonald's has made the decision to relocate its global headquarters from the Chicago suburbs to an older building in the West Loop area. This new home was intended to be a smarter one, combining on-brand interior spaces with digital engagements designed to inspire, teach and engage with multiple audiences.

The design process

To respond to the company's request of recreating an innovative, informative and engaging space experience into the new Global Headquarters, the design team decided to work on several multiple interactive walls, educational stations and personalized experiences for every user of the space.

The contents displayed through the digital walls were studied to remain dynamic through an intuitive content management system, and various data feeds, combining curation and automation for facility managers.

Through a long design process of research, strategy definition, development and testing, the final design solution was able to create a revolutionary visitor experience that inspires, empowers, and builds everlasting impressions.

The environmental branding strategy: large-scale engagement

Beginning with the public facing area, the first interesting element is a large LED screen in the lobby, which is programmed with compelling original content that evolves throughout the time.

On floor two, Leviathan's largest interactive experience greets Hamburger University management trainees. Responding to physical movement and touch, capable of accommodating scores of interactions simultaneously, this incredibly powerful experience engine educates through elegant use of interactive timelines and an expansive video archive, inviting users to engage directly with the brand's far-reaching legacy.



FIGURE 3.1.20 | Hamburger University interactive wall, McDonald's Global Headquarters, 2018

The environmental branding strategy: showcasing charitable contributions

On the second floor, visitors will find an educational kiosk dedicated to the Ronald McDonald House Charities Controlled by touchscreen and using a large-scale mosaic presentation style, the feature is constantly updated to relate the ever-expanding story of Ronald McDonald House Charities's work, and its impact. Up on the third floor, donors are showcased in another interactive display, allowing playful sorting and further information discovery related to the charity's contributors.

FIGURE 3.1.21

Large-scale mosaic interactive displays, McDonald's Global Headquarters, 2018



The environmental branding strategy: bringing sustainability to life

Yet another deep-diving installation on the third floor brings the organization's ongoing quest for sustainability to life vibrantly. Touching the screen begins an exploration of the many ways McDonald's is using its scale for good, leveraging rich media resources to shows their achievements with the aim of educating the most curious minds.



FIGURE 3.1.22

Interactive screens dedicated to sustainability, McDonald's Global Headquarters, 2018

The environmental branding goals: narrative experience and digital engagement

In conclusion, the McDonald's Global Headquarters, through this project, positions the organization as a forward-thinking company that attracts high talent, educating and highlighting McDonald's employees, fresh recruits and veterans alike.

In addition, the space fosters collaboration and inspires delivering human-centric takeaways that are both thoughtful and impactful, reinforcing McDonald's mission into the future.

And finally, also in this case study, the relationship between environmental branding and the sense of belonging appears to be made explicit by the company's desire to create recognition, interaction and connection within its community.

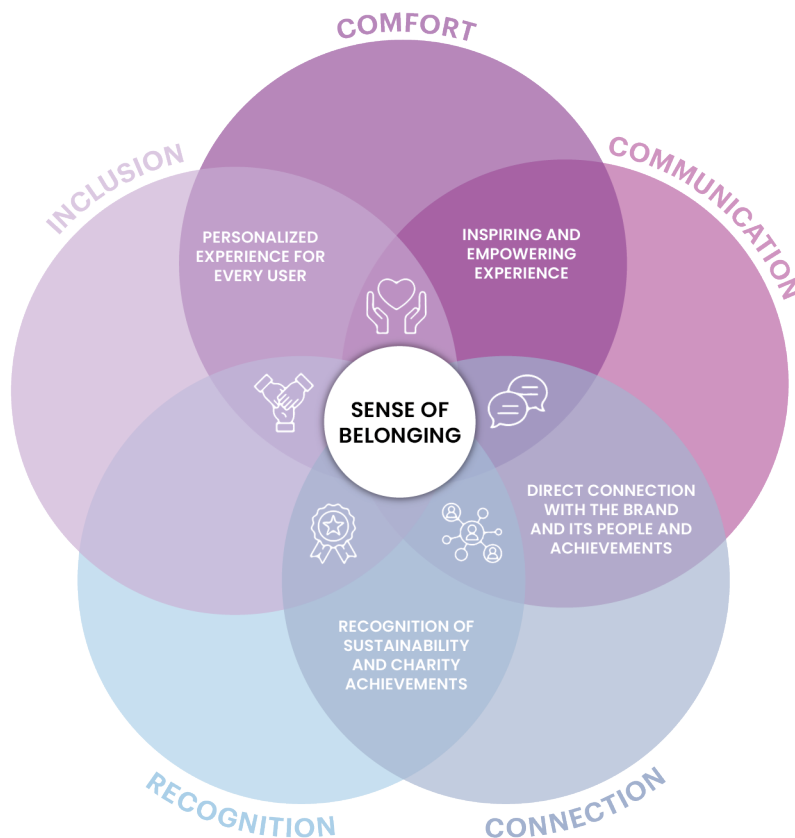


FIGURE 3.1.23 | How McDonald's environmental branding strategy supports sense of belonging

What are the objectives that prompted companies to implement an environmental branding project?

Taking into consideration my experience working for environmental branding projects in Accenture and the case studies just exposed, it is clearly emerged that the principal objective that unites all companies is to build, through a branded environment, a faithful representation of the corporate identity in the physical space.

Going deeper into the case study analysis, I noticed that the main reasons that push companies to undertake a branding intervention are usually linked to a necessity of updating the image of the working environment related to a change in the direction of the company's business, linked for example to the acquisition of new resources or to the opening of new offices in a different local reality; this situation specifically cause a need to re-establish a sense of belonging to that new business direction or new location.

Consequently, very often, this type of intervention is linked to the demonstration of a renewed and improved attention to the employee so as to define one's own strategy for planning the environmental branding intervention with a people-centered perspective.


For example, in the case of Atlassian Austin Headquarters there was a particular attention of the branding team towards the design of cultural expression points, that led to represent the uniqueness local cultural of the location in which the office is hosted, offering a place of connection and recognition with the new local identity and favouring a stimulating use of the new spaces.

Other interesting reasons related to community strengthening and the improving of interaction between people have also emerged; an example can be seen in the goal of maintaining and strengthening the bond between the company and the employee promoted by McDonald's in its Global Headquarters: supporting inspiration and motivation to work and encouraging direct contact with the company through the participation or the acknowledgment of the community's works, reinforcing the awareness and consequently the sense of belonging to that community.

A similar strategy can be seen in the YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby's case study where, with the implementation of a digital interactive installation, the company succeeded in encouraging visitors to interact with each other to discover and be entertained with creator's and community's digital contents; thus strengthening the connections with both the physical and digital communities.

Below, a series of schemes will summarize the strategies that each company has adopted to achieve its main goals through the design of an office environmental branding project.


CASE I | Atlassian Austin Headquarters



OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	SOLUTION
Welcome	Reflect the local culture	Physical
Strengthen engagement	Push to interact with the environment, through self expression	Physical
Inspire and motivate	Learn and discover promoting culture spread	Physical

FIGURE 3.2.1 | Summary diagram of the environmental branding strategies that Atlassian has adopted to achieve its main goals


CASE II | YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby



OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	SOLUTION
Promote wellbeing	Through the use of natural elements and cozy materials	Physical
Strengthen engagement	Push to interact with the environment through the digital wall	Phygital
Foster the sense of belonging	Through the discovery of the community and the content they create	Phygital

FIGURE 3.2.2 | Summary diagram of the environmental branding strategies that YouTube has adopted to achieve its main goals

CASE III | Terrell Place Lobby



OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	TOOL
Unique identity representation	Characterizing the space through a large scale installation	Phygital
Strengthen engagement	Dynamic and movement-responsive installation	Phygital
Offer a new way to experience that space	Narrative end immersive installation	Phygital

FIGURE 3.2.3 | Summary diagram of the environmental branding strategies that Terrell Place has adopted to achieve its main goals

CASE IV | McDonald's Global Headquarters



OBJECTIVE	STRATEGY	TOOL
Corporate culture spread	Narrate testimonials and successes achieved by the company	Phygital
Strengthen engagement	Multiple interactive displays	Phygital
Educate and raise awareness	Offering a narrative experience of the space	Physical + Phygital

FIGURE 3.2.4 | Summary diagram of the environmental branding strategies that McDonald has adopted to achieve its main goals

As we can see below (FIG. 3.2.5) many of these objectives, that companies have aspired to, through the implementation of an environmental branding project, can be classified within the five sub-categories that underpin and support the employee's sense of belonging towards a company.

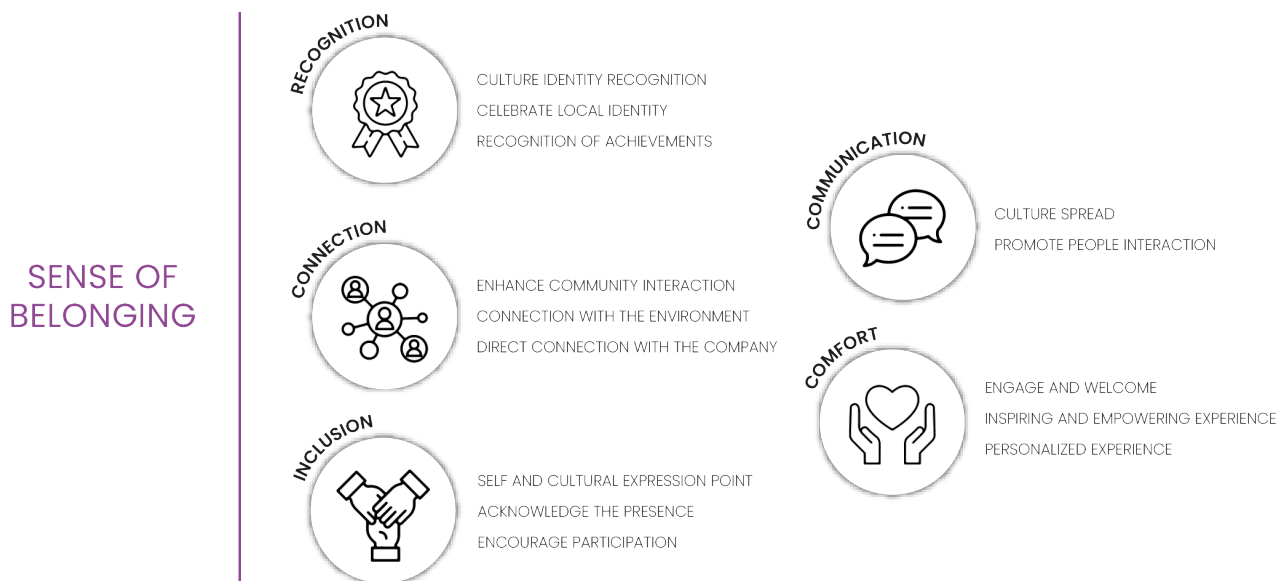


FIGURE 3.2.5 | Scheme that classifies the objectives emerged from the case studies according to the categories of the sense of belonging

What are the principles and values that these companies wanted to convey through an environmental branding intervention?

To answer this question, the most frequently cited words in the description of the environmental branding projects analysed, have been collected. These words, which were the most frequently used in the description of the values and principles that the companies wanted to communicate through their projects; have been collected and organized in a “cloud of words”, in order to show at a first glance, the weight of importance that each of these element takes in these workplace environmental branding’s projects.



FIGURE 3.2.6 | “Word cloud” that shows the frequency of use of notions related to principles and values conveyed the environmental branding’s project analyzed

And even in this case, we can see how many of these values, such as inclusiveness, celebrating the individual and strengthening the perception of a community, are closely linked to the sphere of the sense of belonging to which we referred earlier.

Fostering sense of belonging through the workspace experience

As we have seen in most of the case studies, environmental branding interventions were carried out to communicate the values of a company, to welcome, support and motivate all the organization’s people; all these elements together represent a way to satisfy a much wider need, that of the sense of belonging.

Now we are going to summarize and highlight which environmental branding strategies the companies have adopted to support the pillars of belonging.



	 PHYSICAL SOLUTION	 PHYGITAL SOLUTION
COMFORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Colours •Materials •Nature elements •Wayfinding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersive installation • Interactive installation/canvas • Narrative installation/canvas
COMMUNICATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Artwork •Branding artifacts •Corporate images and messages •Self-expression points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital canvas • Interactive walls • Video-testimonials
CONNECTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Historical photos •Interactive and playful environment •Testimonials sharing •Wall of stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive wall to discover community's successes, contents and people • Movement-based installation
INCLUSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Culture spread points •Motivating quotes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive culture spread points • Interactive storytelling
RECOGNITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Memorabilia exhibition •Local culture artifacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display always updated digital contents (stories, achievements...)

FIGURE 3.2.7 | How the sense of belonging has been promoted through physical and phygital solutions

Examining the solutions adopted, it can be seen that environmental branding is developing in a direction that tends to exploit technologies, adding a digital layer to the physical world to guarantee a better interactivity between people and between people and the organization.

Integrating digital systems to the building, allows an immediate and always updated transmission of information, creating a direct connection with the organization in all its facets, from people, to history, from goals to successes.

These digital interactive branding solutions give the possibility to transform the office, thus making an interactive environment in which people come together in an "intelligent" space allowing them to live a more engaging experience at work.

These phygital spaces enabled using digital interactive branding solutions redefine the user experience in the physical world using technology as an engaging factor: going to directly support with one single solution, all those communication, participation, recognition and inclusion needs that foster the sense of belonging to a community.

In the light of the facts, one might have the intuition that this phygital direction of branding can be more effective in responding to the sense of belonging; and it is precisely in this direction that, through an in-depth study on the practice of environmental branding, considering the processes, the values and the principles that pushed companies to exploit it; I will investigate and propose the use of digital interaction solutions in office's environmental branding projects in relation with the topic of belonging.

04 HOW HAS THE ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING FOR OFFICES BECOME A PRACTICE?

4.1

FROM WHAT NEEDS DOES ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING FOR OFFICE ARISE?

Referring to the experience acquired working for environmental branding projects in Accenture and the knowledge gained through the analysis of the case study findings, a definition of what is environmental branding for offices, will be given in this chapter.

The definition of what the practice of environmental branding is, will be obtained through the highlighting of what motivations and necessities drive companies to undertake an environmental branding intervention for their offices, what the realization process consists of, and what are the principles on which this practice is based.

First of all, to understand the existence of this discipline, it is necessary to know what are the reasons that push companies to express their identity through spaces; and to do this, it is necessary to take a step back and talk about the human needs of personalization and self-expression that leads to the behaviour of personalizing their own workspace and subsequently understand how this trend, on a large scale, has evolved in the environmental branding practice.

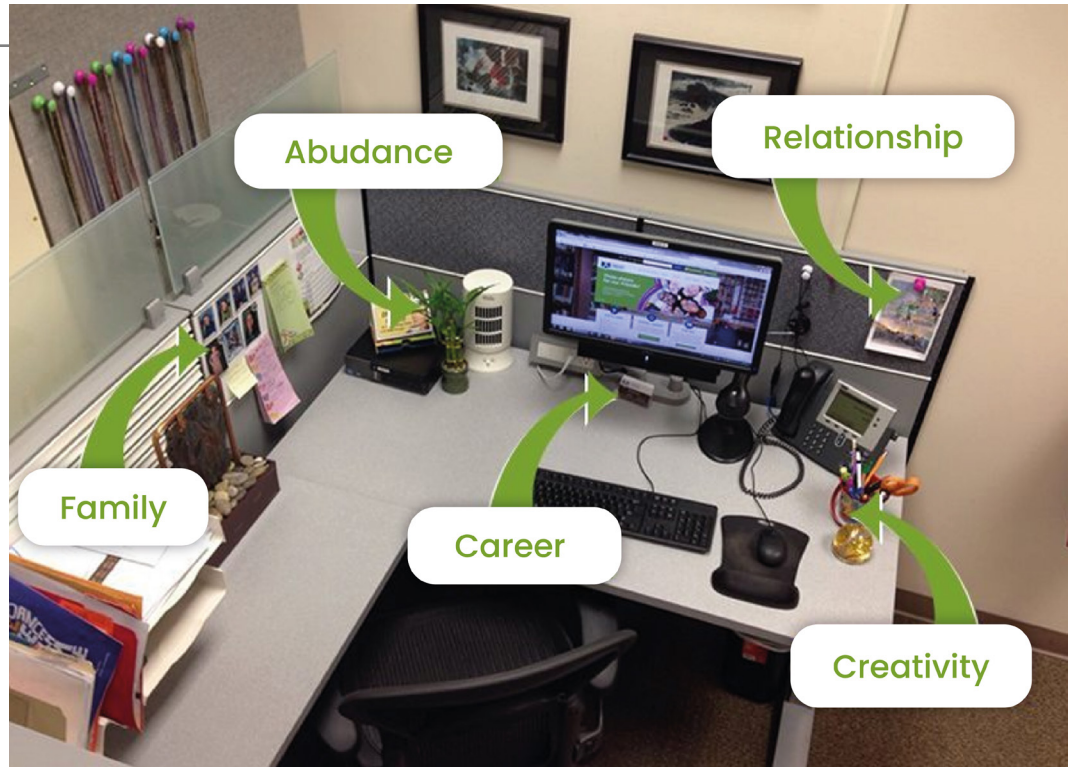
"The congruence between the image of oneself and that of the place where one lives, refers precisely to how much the meanings and values associated with a physical environment and the image that a person has of himself is adapted. The environment in which we live, understood as a neighbourhood and not just a house, works a bit like a dress in giving the image of how we want to look. When, for various reasons, there are discrepancies between a person's place identity and the physical place in which he resides, his efforts will be aimed at modifying the environment according to an image congruent to himself. If he does not succeed, attachment to that place will inevitably decrease or cease"

(Baroni, 2012, p.77)

The personalization of the workspace consists in the decoration or the voluntary modification of the environment by its occupants, so that it reflects their identity. This customization can be done through the arrangement of physical objects in the environment such as plants, photos, lamps; or changing the furniture so that the space is more comfortable for the person who will go to live that spaces.

FIGURE 4.1.1

Picture of a decorated workstation, picture from a Financial Consultant Office, Gujarat, India



As reported in the research examined by Noorian (2009), the personalization of space would be able to prevent work-related stress, to support the expression of one's identity, well-being and satisfaction both for the work environment and for the work in and of itself. Furthermore, according to Wells, Thelen, & Ruark (2007) a positive association between personalization and organizational commitment would also emerge.

Generally, the personalization of space is considered as a territorial behaviour that affects the well-being of the person in different ways such as: allowing a person to express their emotions and personality with benefits in terms of general well-being, improving the feeling of personal control over the space, so as to increase job satisfaction and reduce stress.

With the evolution of working methods, many companies no longer offer their employees fixed and assigned workstations, an example can be seen in the increasingly widespread use of coworking spaces, which are flexible and open.

So nowadays, it is difficult to leave employees the possibility to customize their workspace, sometimes also for corporate image and tidy reasons, but above all, in the field of safety at work; since current regulations provide the impossibility of adding or moving objects within the space, in order to reduce the risk of accidents at work and leave the spaces free to facilitate the flow of exit in emergency situations.

Therefore, in this situation the offices would have remained anonymous and undifferentiated from each other and unwelcoming, not to mention the fact that organizations which do not allow employees to personalize their workspace, could give them the feeling that the absence of a physical trace, symbolizes the absence of their influence in the organization.

To overcome this problem, companies have decided to transform this criticality into an opportunity to express their corporate identity through these spaces, by transforming them into more welcoming and identifying environments for their employees.

4.2

FROM A CRITICALITY TO AN OPPORTUNITY: THE SPREAD OF OFFICE ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING

A further push that led companies to consider environmental branding, came from the post-pandemic situation that, after the forced use of remote home working, it led companies to reflect on the well-being of workers upon returning to the office and on how the workspace must respond to the needs for flexibility, security, and sense of belonging that have emerged predominantly by the recent researches about the employee's work experience.

It is not just a matter of working in healthy environments, of ensuring air exchange and social distancing, but of creating, even with a few simple precautions, welcoming places that stimulate creativity, support concentration, and help socialize.

Employee satisfaction has deeper origins than remuneration and benefits: true satisfaction comes from a company's work culture and the attention that the company has towards the person. A healthy and engaging work culture plays a key role in both employee loyalty and productivity.

An element that strongly reflects the work culture is the quality of the work environment. A pleasant office space fosters a solid corporate culture and encourages employees to invest in the company itself. It can provide the foundation on which to increase employee performance, satisfaction and commitment.

The personalization of space and the creation of comfortable and welcoming environments, therefore, are a solution that helps the well-being of workers and assists the communication of the company's attention to people.

The personalization of the workspace, in addition to reflecting a healthy corporate culture and taking care of the psycho-physical well-being of employees, also contributes in building a solid brand image.

Today more than ever, if companies want to retain the best from their people, they need to give them a workplace that they find fulfilling, that's why it's important to create a culture that unites employees, setting and broadcasting a clear direction through all the communication channels, including physical spaces. A work environment that reflects the brand and the values connected to it, stimulates motivation, creativity and sense of belonging.

The brand identity its fundamental for the definition of workspaces, not only from a marketing and communication perspective, but also as an engagement tool for employees and as a means to offer performance and increase well-being in the workplace.

Therefore, environmental branding can be defined as the process of designing a communication within the office space, that reflects the values and principles of the company with the aim of stimulating the motivation and participation of employees, welcoming them in an environment that reflects their work goals.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING?

The process of designing a three-dimensional space that reflects the company identity communicating it's values, messages, stories and images.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES?

Create welcoming places that **stimulate creativity, motivation, and help socialize.**

Foster a **solid and consistent corporate culture perception** to encourage employee's satisfaction and commitment.

Communicate the company's attention to people, **enriching the experience** of the people who interact with the space.

FIGURE 4.2.1 | Scheme that summarizes what environmental branding is and what its objectives are

The attention to the brand identity in the environment focuses on the transposition of values and images through graphics and contents into physical space.

At the design level this is translated into choices related to the aesthetic aspect of the environment, such as the colours of the logo that can be recalled into the spaces, the transmission through graphics, of words and messages that refer to the company mission and the use of special materials that evoke its values.

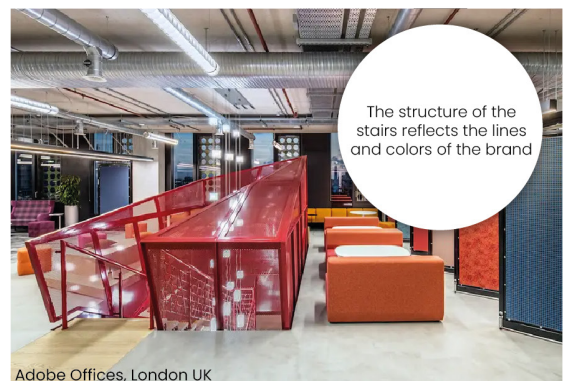
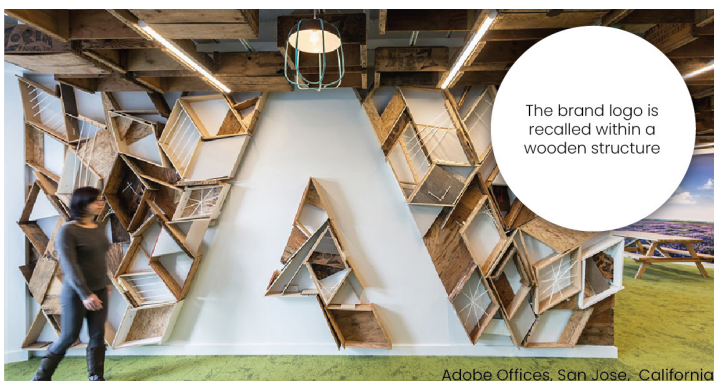




FIGURE 4.2.2 | Photo collections showing the branding interventions in the Adobe offices

There are many reasons for combining brand identity with the design of workspaces, first of all the awareness of the beauty and enhancement of places, through which it is possible to transmit values and promote virtuous behaviour in line with the culture of the company.

A brand communication project should be integrated with synergy into the interior design, in this way, the identity and the image of the places will become extensions of the identity and the image of the brand itself.

The purpose of environmental branding is to transform the architectural space into a communication tool in which to convey company's messages and information.

The goal is to create a brand experience, consistent with the positioning of the brand in the reference market, completing the architectural space and enriching the perception of the people who interact with it.

In fact, places must inspire and promote a sense of community, creating identification and connection between people and the brand.



FIGURE 4.2.3 | Photo collections showing the branding interventions in LEGO Headquarters, Denmark

This approach is very noticeable in the case of LEGO headquarters in Denmark (2021), where the company have been recognized, as primary design criteria for environmental branding, an high level of integration of the corporate identity through the environment; with the use of the right balance of colors and elements in the space that effectively reflect the brand image, this project communicate to the employees a creative, playful and inspiring atmosphere consistent with what the company promotes.

So, the main reason that prompted the company to undertake a branding project of this entity was to empower their employees creativity and connection with their work, offering them a playful, dynamic and encouraging use of space; expanding in the workspaces the same values and principles that the company promotes through its products.

Integrated communication and signage systems are some of the tools used to involve the users of the spaces, the places must in fact improve the quality of time and work by making clear and useful the scanning of spaces and information necessary to better enjoy all the environments.



Wayfinding to make clear and useful the scanning of spaces and information necessary to better enjoy all environments

FIGURE 4.2.4 | Examples of different variations of wayfinding in offices

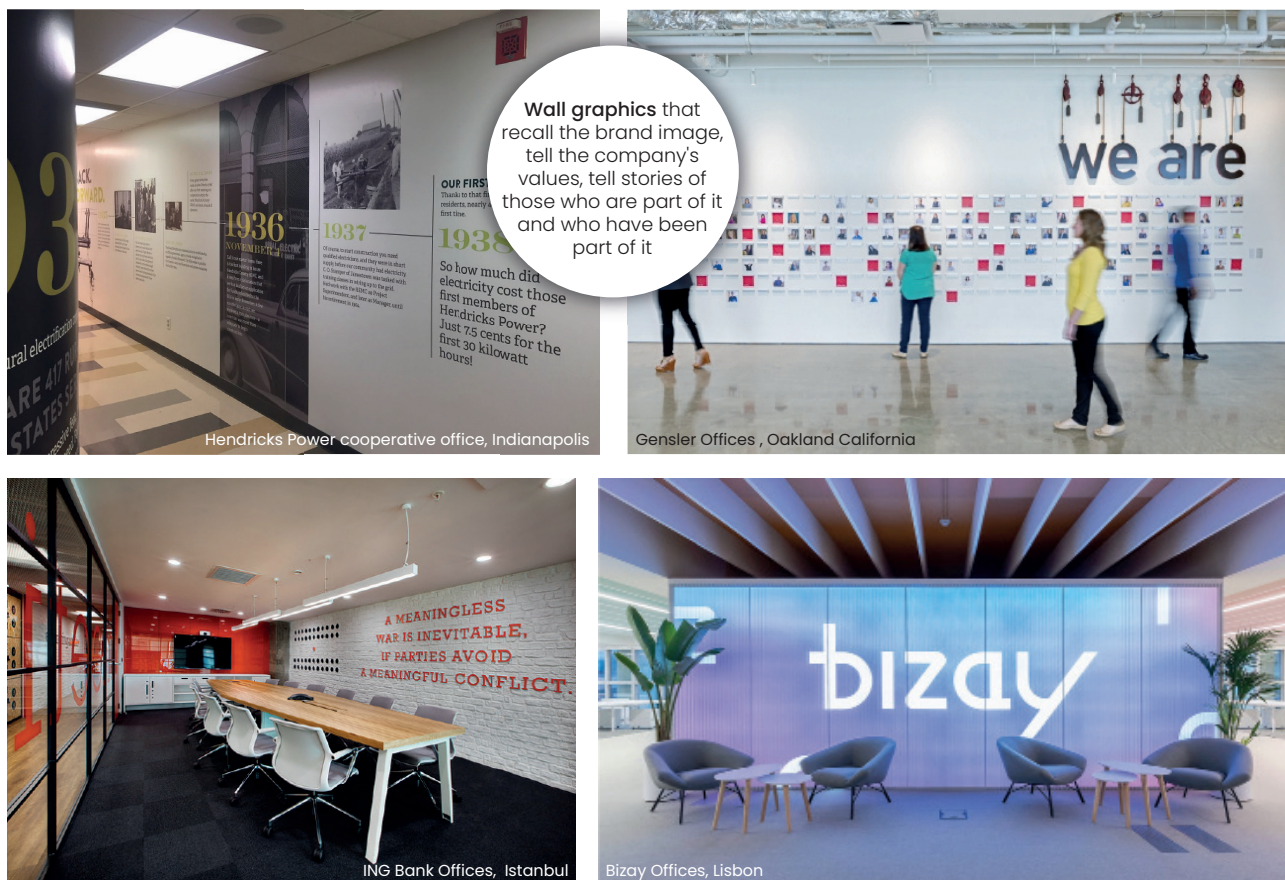
In this sense, wayfinding is very important as it has the function of facilitating orientation within a place. Wayfinding allows people to understand where they are, where they want to go and how to go there in the simplest way possible.

Signage is not limited to providing information and guiding people, it is also and above all, a question of identity. It is a question of giving visual expression to a space, allowing places to express their recognition image and, in offices, their function.

To communicate, the building and its spaces are used as a large environmental medium. The communication concept is built and applied to the various supports along the internal paths of the building in which the visual language of the brand becomes the protagonist.

Communication can be conveyed through different tools from the simple use of wall graphics, passing from interactive touchpoints to more complex communication systems managed by digital signage.

From a criticality to an opportunity. the spread of office environmental branding



Wall graphics that recall the brand image, tell the company's values, tell stories of those who are part of it and who have been part of it

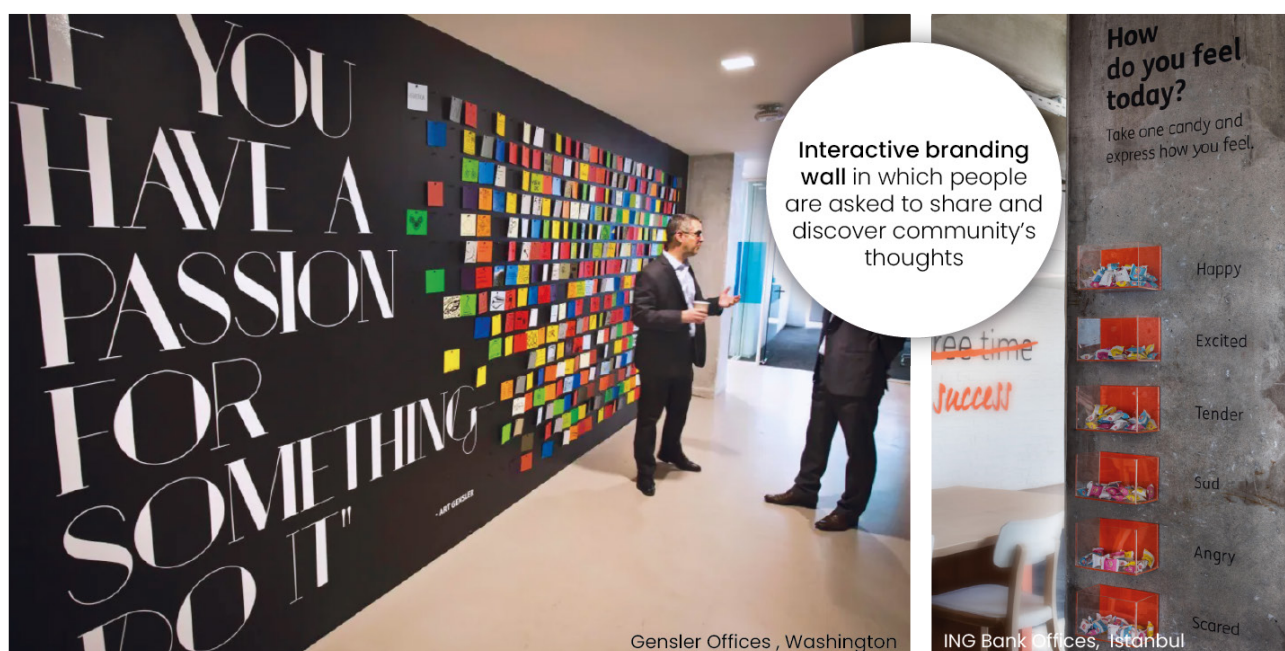
Hendricks Power cooperative office, Indianapolis

Gensler Offices , Oakland California

ING Bank Offices, Istanbul

Bizay Offices, Lisbon

FIGURE 4.2.5 | Examples of different variations of wall graphics in offices



Interactive branding wall in which people are asked to share and discover community's thoughts

Gensler Offices , Washington

ING Bank Offices, Istanbul

FIGURE 4.2.6 | Examples of interactive branding wall in offices



FIGURE 4.2.7 | Examples of digital signage in offices

4.3 HOW CAN ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING ANSWER TO THE SENSE OF BELONGING REQUIREMENTS?

After having highlighted the principles, the values and the motivations behind environmental branding, now we can answer to the initial question of belonging's satisfaction in the workplace achieved through environmental branding solutions. We can therefore summarize, how each single component of environmental branding can respond to each of the five requirements that support the sense of belonging.

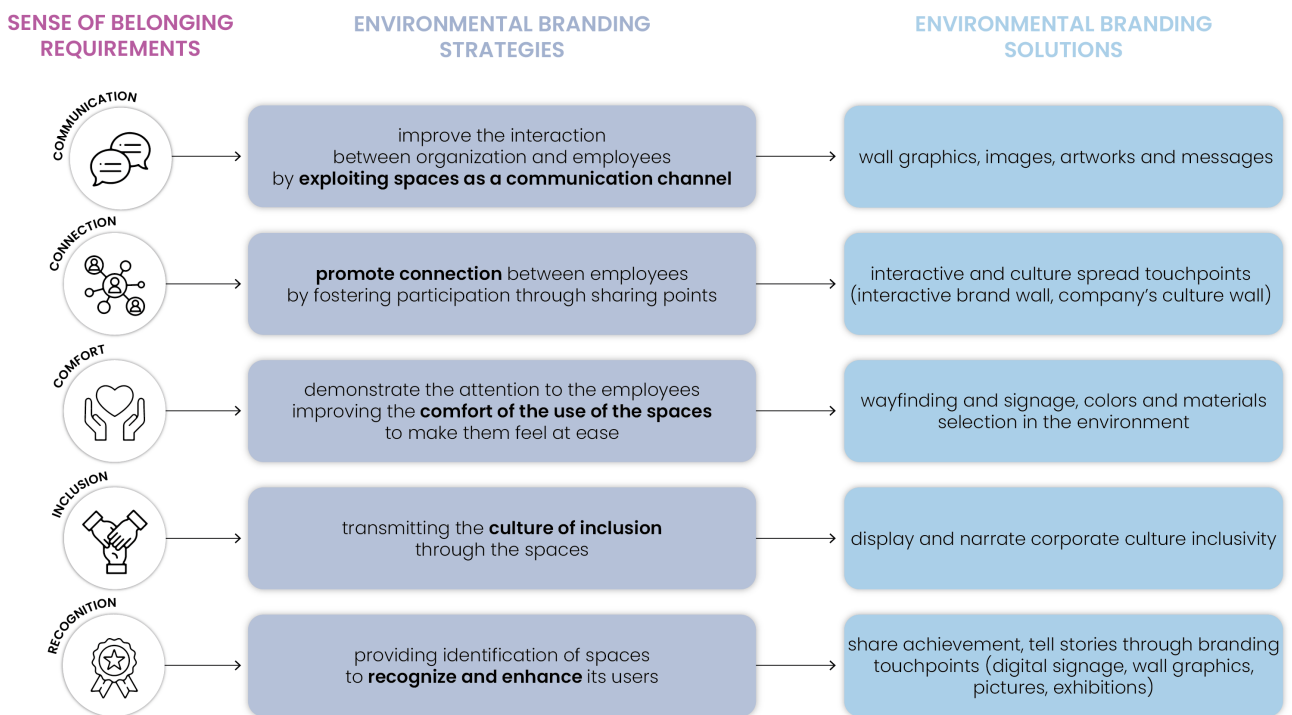


FIGURE 4.3.1 | Summary of environmental branding solutions to meet the sense of belonging requirements

How can environmental branding answer to the sense of belonging requirements?

By analyzing the strategies of environmental branding, it can be seen a new direction has emerged within this practice, especially in relation to the sense of belonging, that of the use of digital interactive solutions.

Therefore, taking into consideration the case study findings and making a comparison between the requirements dictated by the search in supporting the sense of belonging with the solutions obtained implementing a digital interaction intervention; it can be seen that digital interactive environmental branding design could achieve all the sense of belonging's requirements in a more agile single solution.

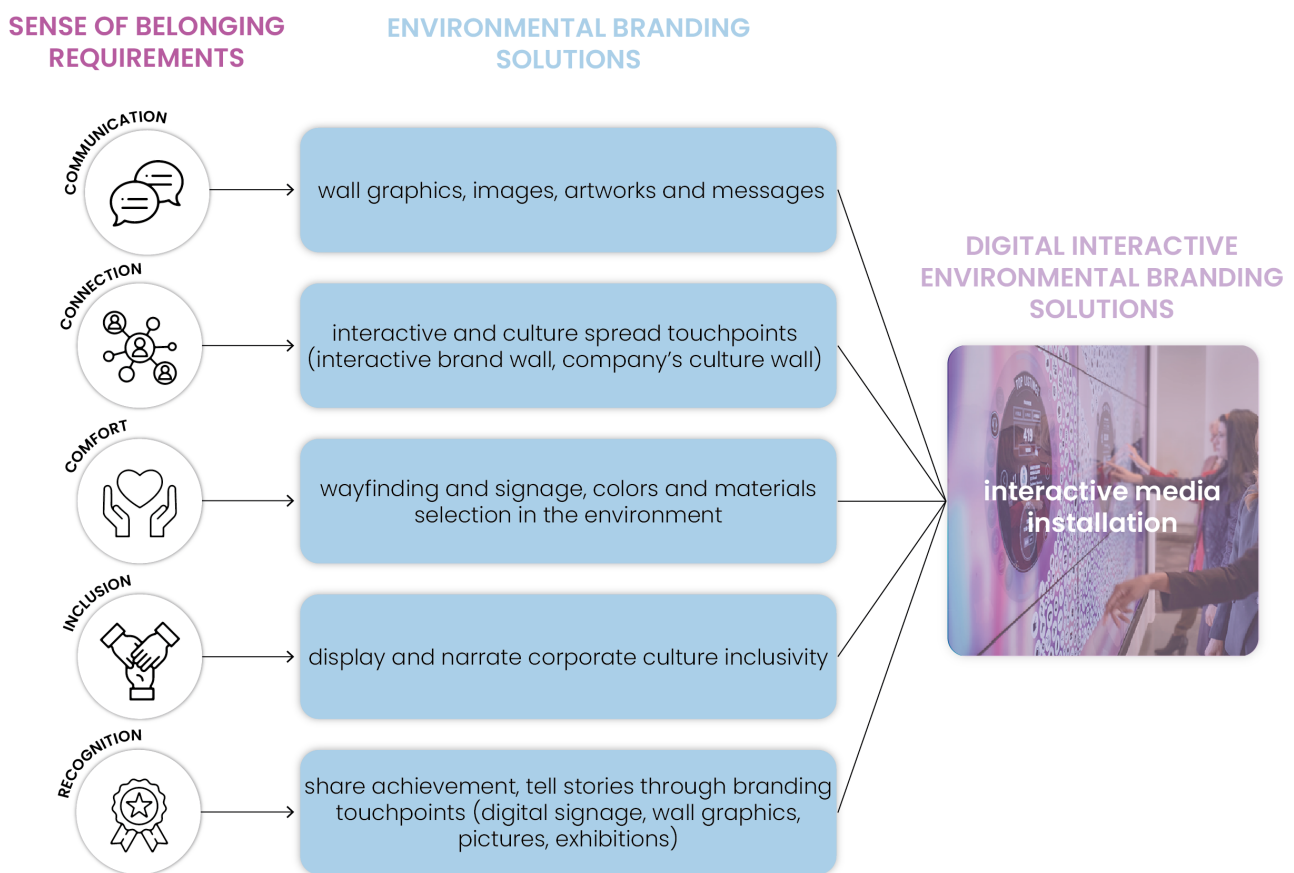


FIGURE 4.3.2 | Answering to the sense of belonging's requirements through digital interactive environmental branding solutions

This intuition, emerged from the combination of my experience in Accenture with my studies as a digital interaction designer, prompted me to explore how the use of a digital interaction approach, in the environmental branding practice, can be more agile in answering to this current and proven need of employees; in order to make them feel they can belong to the workplace.

According to the Capital One Work Environment Survey (2018), the 82% of office workers believe companies should offer an innovative work environment, but the 63% of respondents say that this innovation is not currently present in the offices where they work.

Furthermore, also according to some studies of cognitive neuroscience and psychology, with particular reference to the research of the architectural critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen (2017); there is evidence that exposing employees to generic and monotonous environments on a daily basis, can lead to boredom, unhappiness and physical discomfort.

Ignoring this field of research, most traditional offices continue to use rigid and static environmental branding components, rather than the digital dynamic ones that instead can foster engagement.

To make the workplace more engaging, its design should prioritize the needs of the people who will use and work in it every day. Organizations need to understand the users, differentiating them between frequent users like employees and one-time visitors like customers that need to have different and distinct experiences.

Advances in technologies are making possible to create workplaces, office buildings and corporate campuses that deliver dynamic and ever-changing experiences that connect employees and engage visitors.

Employees can feel welcomed and motivated by an evolving workspace that reflects their daily rhythms.

This technology-driven strategy for environmental branding, adapts itself well to being applied into dynamic public spaces of the offices: from facades to lobbies and entryways, where both employees and visitors can be welcomed in a recognizable and memorable way.

Further, in the office itself, there are other places where this strategy can be applied: all those shared spaces for employees to work, socialize, meet and play, can be considered; by placing these phygital applications in these strategic high traffic areas, it is possible to encourage the opportunity for people to have informal and unplanned encounter, which can lead to improve the interaction between people, supporting connection and establishing a sense of community.

Through the introduction of technology, from massive installations to interactive tools, there are a number of ways that can be undertaken to enhance the effectiveness of environmental branding in fostering the sense of belonging; the next cases are an examples.

How can environmental branding answer to the sense of belonging requirements?

Phygital experiences to welcome employees

A way that can be undertaken, is acting on the entrance lobbies of the offices, with the aim of creating unique experiences that embody brand to welcome every day the employee in a different way. Providing employees with a different experience every time they enter the office, aims to increase the sense of welcome, recognition and attention towards the user of those spaces, increasing the feeling of comfort.

An example of this “welcome” strategy can be found in Instagram’s New York Headquarters, where visitors are greeted in the lobby by a digital wall featuring rotating stories and posts from the platform’s users around the world, reflecting with a first strong impact, the pulse of the business.

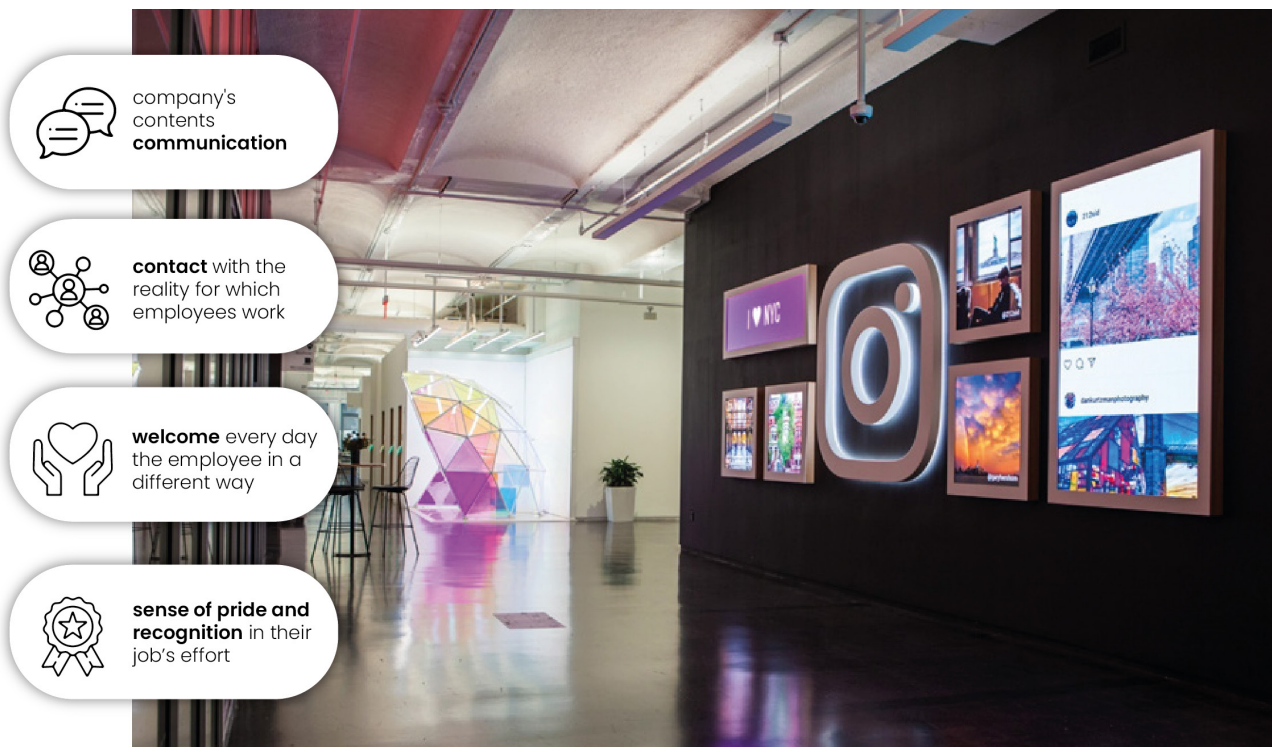


FIGURE 4.3.3 | Answering to the sense of belonging's requirements through digital interactive environmental branding solutions: “The Digital Greeting Wall”, Instagram’s Headquarters lobby, New York, 2018

The element is called “The Digital Greeting Wall” and it is composed of screens that look like frames, that are actually containers for the contents posted on Instagram by the users, every minute the images and the stories change, chosen from among the one billion subscribers of the social network.

This solution puts employees in direct contact with the reality for which they work and with what, through their work, they are able to offer to the numerous users of the platform all over the world; thus, enhancing a sense of pride and recognition in their job’s effort.

Phygital experiences to connect employees

Another solution could be implementing phygital environmental branding tools to characterize spaces with the aim of promoting connection between people.

As we have seen, the sense of connection, inclusion and participation within a community are fundamental points for responding to the need of belonging, and it is precisely through these reactive media that organizations can focus on environmental branding to strengthen the sense community, inviting the interaction through a single, agile and adaptable solution.

An example of this strategy is well demonstrated in the eBay's Silicon Valley campus, where a wide hub called "Main Street" it's been designed with the aim of fostering social interactions and collaborations; transforming the eBay branded space into a people-centric experience while underscoring the company's theme of community.

FIGURE 4.3.4

A Media-rich environment, eBay "Main Street" hub, 2016



It's about a data-driven media experience that tells the story of the company in a fun, interactive way for employees and partners.

The design team found a way to tell a story about the company by gathering data about its users and the products it offers.

The representation of these statistics is generated in real time from eBay product transactions, and it is integrated with contents that highlights the impact of the eBay community on the marketplace and on charitable donations.

How can environmental branding answer to the sense of belonging requirements?

FIGURE 4.3.5

Large scale screens for broadcasting and presentations, eBay "Main Street" hub, 2016



Moreover, this multi-screen display supports live presentations and webcasts; during meeting breaks, the screens show colourful ambient videos alternated with the trending eBay data in searches and purchases.

These dynamic experiences, not only invite employees and guests to engage with the company's story and with each other, it also transforms the eBay workforce into a connected community, making their people see how their work fits into the company's larger mission and goals.



FIGURE 4.3.6

Multi-touch wall, eBay "Main Street" hub, 2016

How can environmental branding answer to the sense of belonging requirements?

The centrepiece is a multi-touch wall where employees can tap icons representing cars, shoes, and other goods, to see how many items were sold in that category in that exact moment, in fact this multi-touch wall draws live data directly from eBay's platform. Designers collaborated with eBay's data teams to create a unique application for this setting, that allows users to explore this content in depth.



FIGURE 4.3.7 | Answering to the sense of belonging's requirements through digital interactive environmental branding solutions: a Media-rich environment, eBay "Main Street" hub, 2016

These are just few examples of how corporate spaces can be turned into interactive powerful communication channels to foster the sense of community, inclusion and participation, and consequently the sense of belonging: through the implementation of interactive media into the environmental branding practice.

The idea is to offer the employees a dynamic workplace in which they can be in direct contact with the core of the company they work for.

Implementing these media-rich, data-driven environments that blend the physical and digital worlds, can create engaging experiences that deliver a lasting and memorable impact, even in a workplace.

05 EXPLOITING A DIGITAL INTERACTIVE BRANDING SOLUTION TO FOSTER SENSE OF BELONGING AT WORK: A PROJECT SCENARIO AT ACCENTURE

5.1 CONTEXT FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF A DIGITAL INTERACTION SOLUTION WITHIN AN ACCENTURE'S ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING PROJECT

Comparing the research findings with the direct experience gained working for environmental branding projects at Accenture, I realized that the company is committed to exploiting this practice only as a means of narrating the brand culture, leading to experience the corporate purpose, mission and values in a passive way, not fully exploiting all the opportunities that the environmental branding can really deliver.

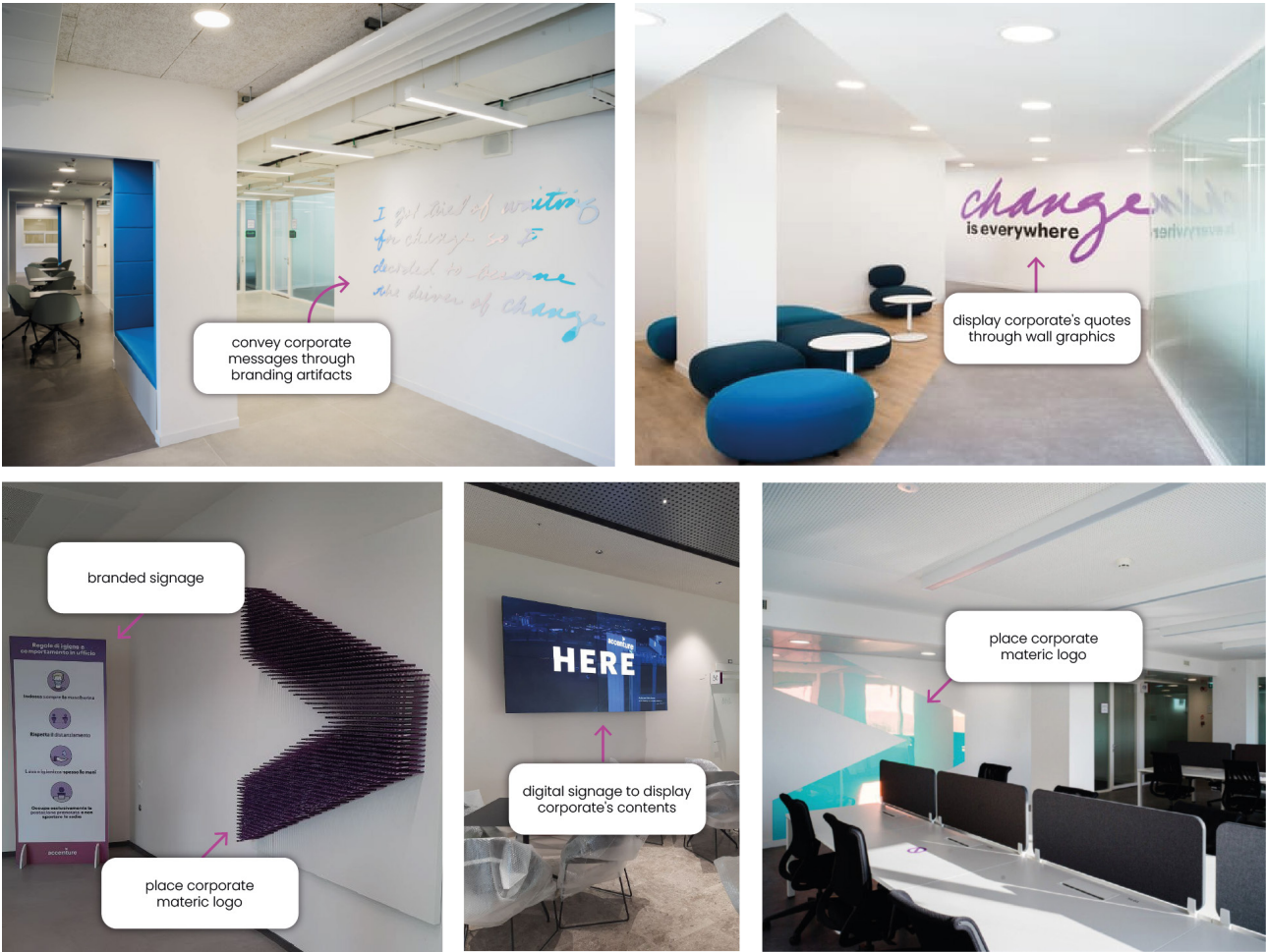


FIGURE 5.1.1 | Photo collection of Accenture Roma Sciangai and Assago Milanofiori environmental branding's projects

Going to observe the principles that Accenture moves towards its employees, among the fundamental values promoted by the company, there are values linked to the creation of a single global network of Accenture people, the support of talents and the respect for the individual and integrity.

Context for the introduction of a digital interaction solution within an Accenture's environmental branding project

We can therefore note a congruence between these values and those that in a broader sense, are related to the sense of belonging; but Accenture has decided not to communicate these values through its environmental branding projects.

The company has instead decided to exploit the environmental branding practice to manage only the satisfaction of employee's need for comfort in the use of space and communication; respectively through the provision of wayfinding , one-way communication channels such as digital signage and wall graphics.

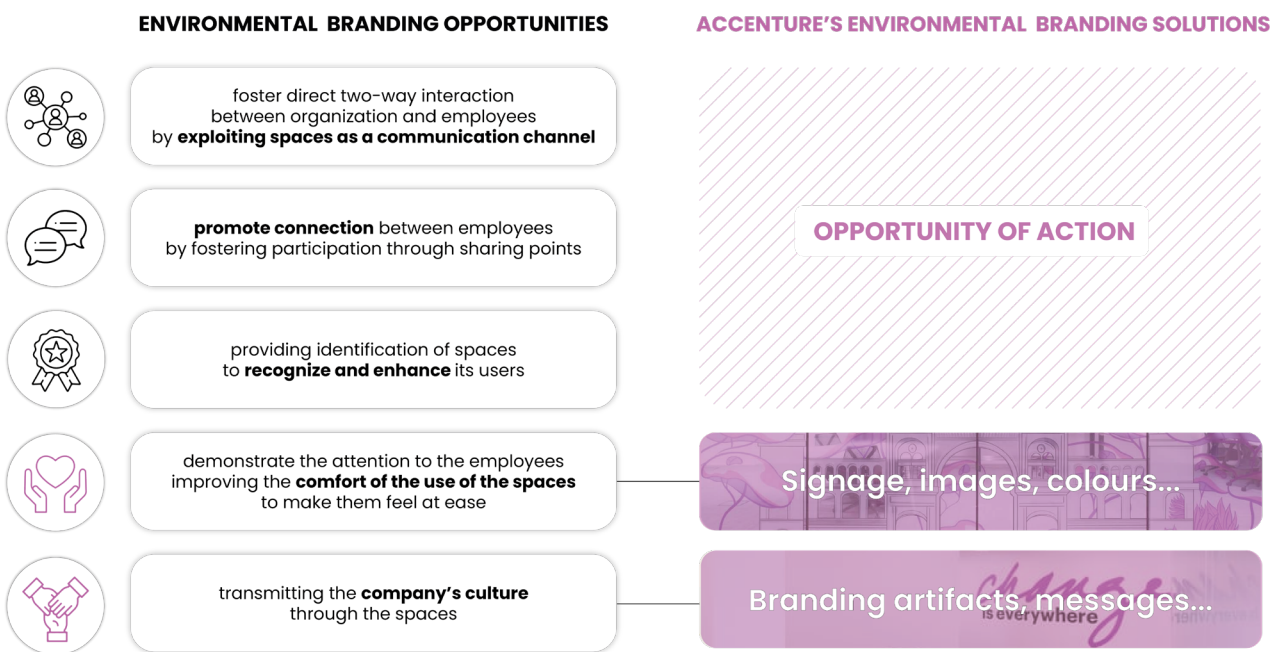


FIGURE 5.1.2 | Scheme that shows Accenture's environmental branding approach in response to the employee belonging's need and the possible opportunity of action

As we can see, what is mostly missing in the environmental branding interventions proposed by Accenture is that part of interactivity, both digital and analogue, which would have the ability to strengthen and support the purpose of participation, interaction and community creation that the company promotes.

Accenture's environmental branding strategy lacks that practical physical representation of what they define as "One Accenture": the creation of a single global entity that connects all the Accenture people into a single community, but this is not put into practice through the space communication.

Environmental branding instead, as we have seen above, it could have been offer an opportunity to highlight, strengthen and foster the sense of belonging to this unique global entity declared by the company.

When an environmental branding strategy does not fully represent the organization's purpose, mission and values, it is impoverished, and it loses its strength.

Accordingly, in this chapter, taking as a starting point a context of application of an environmental branding project done at Accenture; a design alternative to the approach followed by the company will be suggested. This proposal will involve the use of a digital interactive environmental branding solution.

STEP 1 | The Company's brief: the space of the intervention and its goal

The starting context that prompted me to propose an alternative scenario to the environmental branding approach conducted by Accenture, was the space renovation and work experience enrichment program undertaken by the company with the Forward Buildings project in 2019; a program that focused on investing in a combination of flexible work and physical location of the workspace with the aim of reaffirming the relevance of the personal and professional life of employees.

The construction of these so-called Forward Buildings, according to Accenture (Accenture Press Office, 2019) would favor the aggregation and the sense of belonging of the employees to the organization.

Specifically, each new building expected by the program, brought with it, the request for a personalized environmental branding intervention in line with the purpose of the program: the promotion of a coherent experience throughout the national territory, based on collaboration and connection of the employees with the entire corporate ecosystem.

Greater attention to these objectives can be seen in the design of the environmental branding intervention for the Assago Milanofiori's People Hub; a building, thought as a corporate campus, where the spaces are designed to offer employees an inclusive and stimulating work experience. The building has been thought mainly as a place for relationships and aggregation in which to meet, socialize, collaborate and co-create.

In particular, the opportunity to propose an alternative scenario to the environmental branding approach, emerged with the request for the design of a branding intervention dedicated to a particular space of this building; it was a common area, created with the aim of offering employees a place where they could take a break, refresh themselves and socialize.

Called "Network Café", this space is located on the ground floor near the entrance and the elevator lobby, it is equipped with a café and an informal rest area.

Context for the introduction of a digital interaction solution within an Accenture's environmental branding project

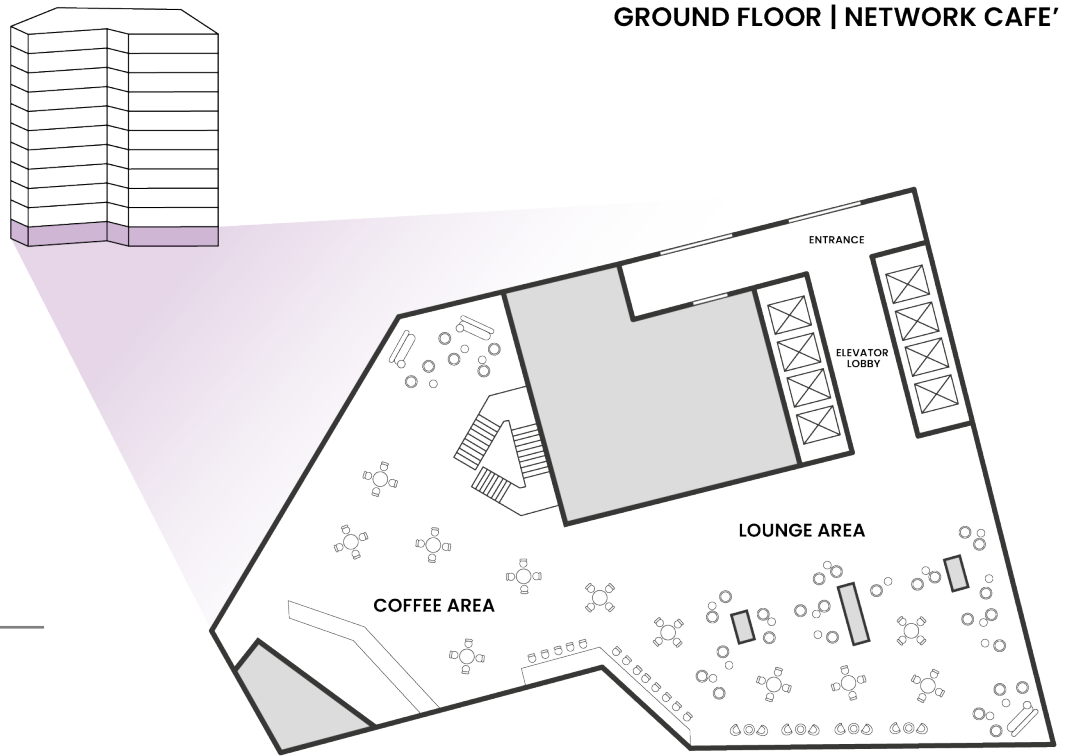


FIGURE 5.1.3
Space configuration and position of the Network Café

The Network Café has been thought as the pivot of interaction among the employees inside the building; so that, an environmental branding intervention in that space, should have been designed in line with this purpose of encouraging and fostering interaction between people.

Instead, the solution that has been proposed following the classic approach of environmental branding pursued by Accenture, was to add some material elements that recalled the colours and the communication that guide the brand identity of the company; using, in this way, the environmental branding with the only purpose of representing the image of the company in the space, without exploiting its real engaging power in communicating the values and the intentions that Accenture would like to express in that space.



FIGURE 5.1.4
The actual environmental branding project realized for the Network Café space

In the light of what we have seen in the previous chapters and the goal to be achieved in this space; a solution that could have added value to strengthen the aim for which the Network Café was conceived, could have been the implementation of an interactive and connection conducive environmental branding intervention.

I decided to exploit the chance of the environmental branding project's request for the Network Café space, to propose a scenario that implements an interactive environmental branding solution to respond to the brief defined by the company.

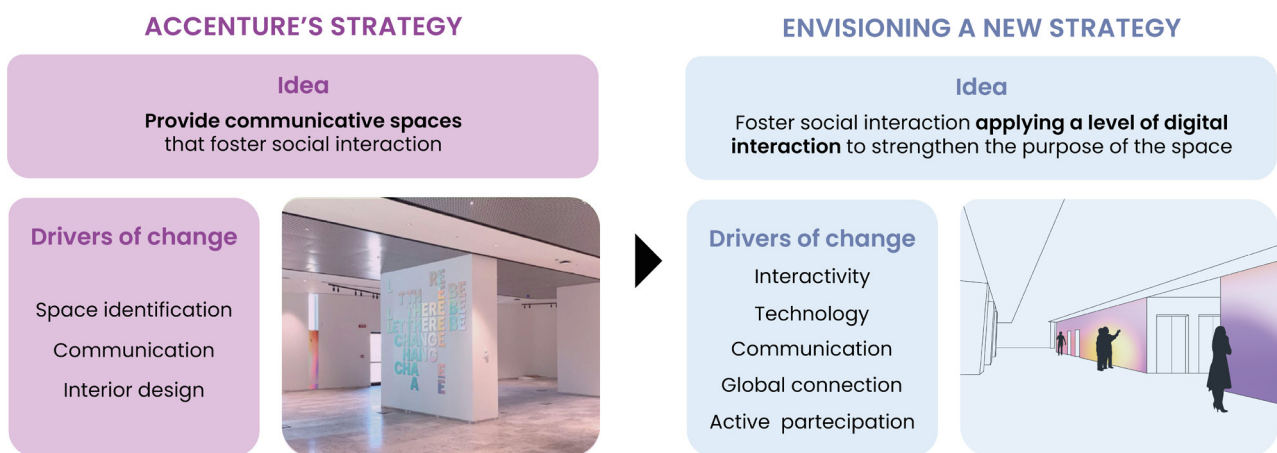


FIGURE 5.1.5 | Answering to the brief: Accenture's strategy VS. the new scenario's strategy

The idea is to take advantage of the opportunity to exploit environmental branding to support one of the main values promoted by the company, what the company calls "One Accenture", its desire to create a network of connection to which the employees feel they belongs and in which they feel they can trust.

This opportunity of branding the Network Café was taken to demonstrate how to convey the message of "community creation", in a practical and participatory sense, in such a way as to propose a digital interactive environmental branding scenario that foster interaction between the people who are part of the Accenture reality, encouraging the creation of connections and reinforcing that sense of community to which one feels to belong.

HOW TO BRING DIGITAL INTERACTION DESIGN INTO AN ENVIRONMENTAL BRANDING PROJECT

Starting from the initial brief given by the company, in this paragraph will be proposed a guideline on how to carry out an environmental branding intervention by integrating a digital interaction solution.

These guidelines will follow the typical design process I have applied and learned in the course of my studies; starting from the initial brief up to the ideation and validation phase. As far as this research is concerned, I will reach the stage of ideation, leaving the other phase of future implementations for the company.

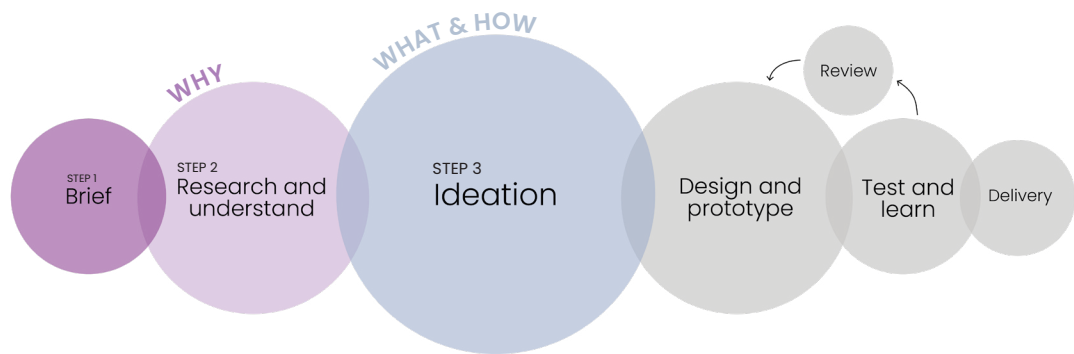


FIGURE 5.2.1 | Design process that will be followed for the implementation of a digital interaction solution in the environmental branding intervention

STEP 2 | The research: understand user's needs and behaviour

Once the space where the company decided to carry out an environmental branding intervention has defined, it is necessary to analyze the use of that space, to understand its functionality, the people's flows through the space and the motivations that guide people in using it.

First of all, it is necessary to research and analyze user's expectations and needs in relation of the use of that space, collecting informations through questionnaires, interviews or focus group. Further information can be obtained by observing the flows and the movements of the people who experience the space and how they interact with it and between each other in that environment.

So in this phase, it is fundamental to define the *WHY* and therefore understand the user's interaction experience with the environment, his emotions, needs and subjective impressions emerged about the question of company's belonging and interaction.

Thus to understand if the demand for interaction and the need of community's inclusion and sense of belonging, is effectively the added value that push employees to go to the Network Cafè during their breaks, instead of staying at their desk and having a snack on their own floor of the building in the work area.

To retrieve this information, I opted to make a non-participant observation of people behaviors in the real context where the branding digital interaction solution should have been created. The aim was to observe the presence and the behaviors of people passing through the Network Cafè at different times of the working day, in order to understand the reasons and the needs that push people to use the space and what kind of interactions take place inside it.

Furthermore, to develop a deeper understanding of the people's behavior and motivations I decided to interview 3 subjects directly on the field, asking them what their expectations were and what prompted them to use that space.

From the responses received and the information collected during the observation, I could note that the space is actually mainly used for the cafè service offered, that is highly preferred by employees, in comparison with the service offered by the vending machines distributed on each floor of the building; and that this is the main reason that pushes people to organize appointments in the Network Cafè to spend the break with colleagues. Another interesting point related to the interaction between people is the presence of the mini football table, which in the moments of break could have been another important point for aggregation, but for as long as I conducted the observation, it was never been used.

Another similar consideration can be made about the use of the central area of this space, furnished with seats and tables, which being far from the cafè area are remained unused, because of the lack of a spur for social interaction such as the one given by the food consuming.

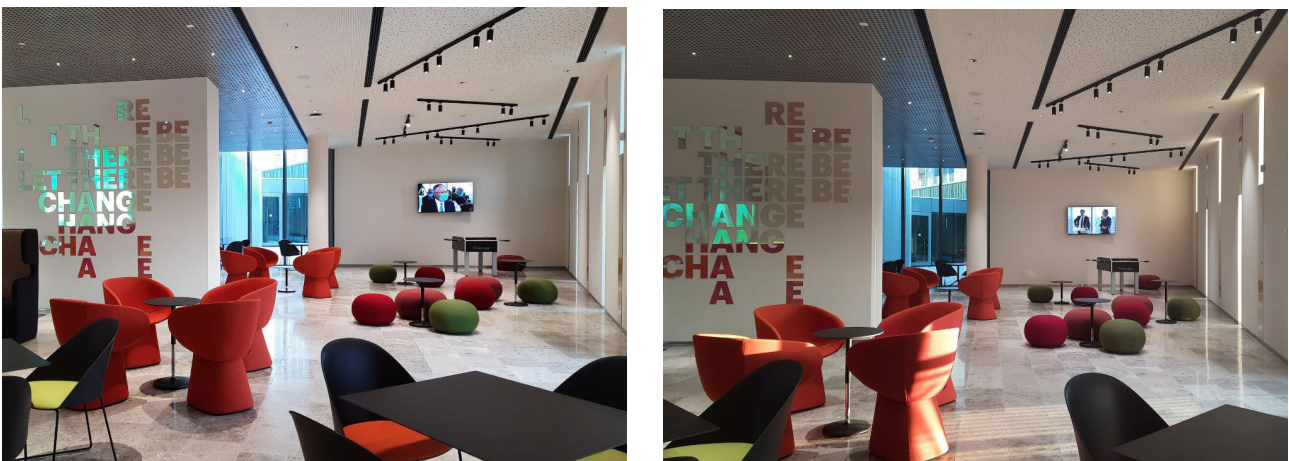


FIGURE 5.2.2 | Collection of photographs of the central area of the Network Cafè taken during the observation, respectively at 10am and at 5pm on the same day

To provide an overview of a person’s experience in the Network Cafè, I organized the information collected into an Empathy Map.

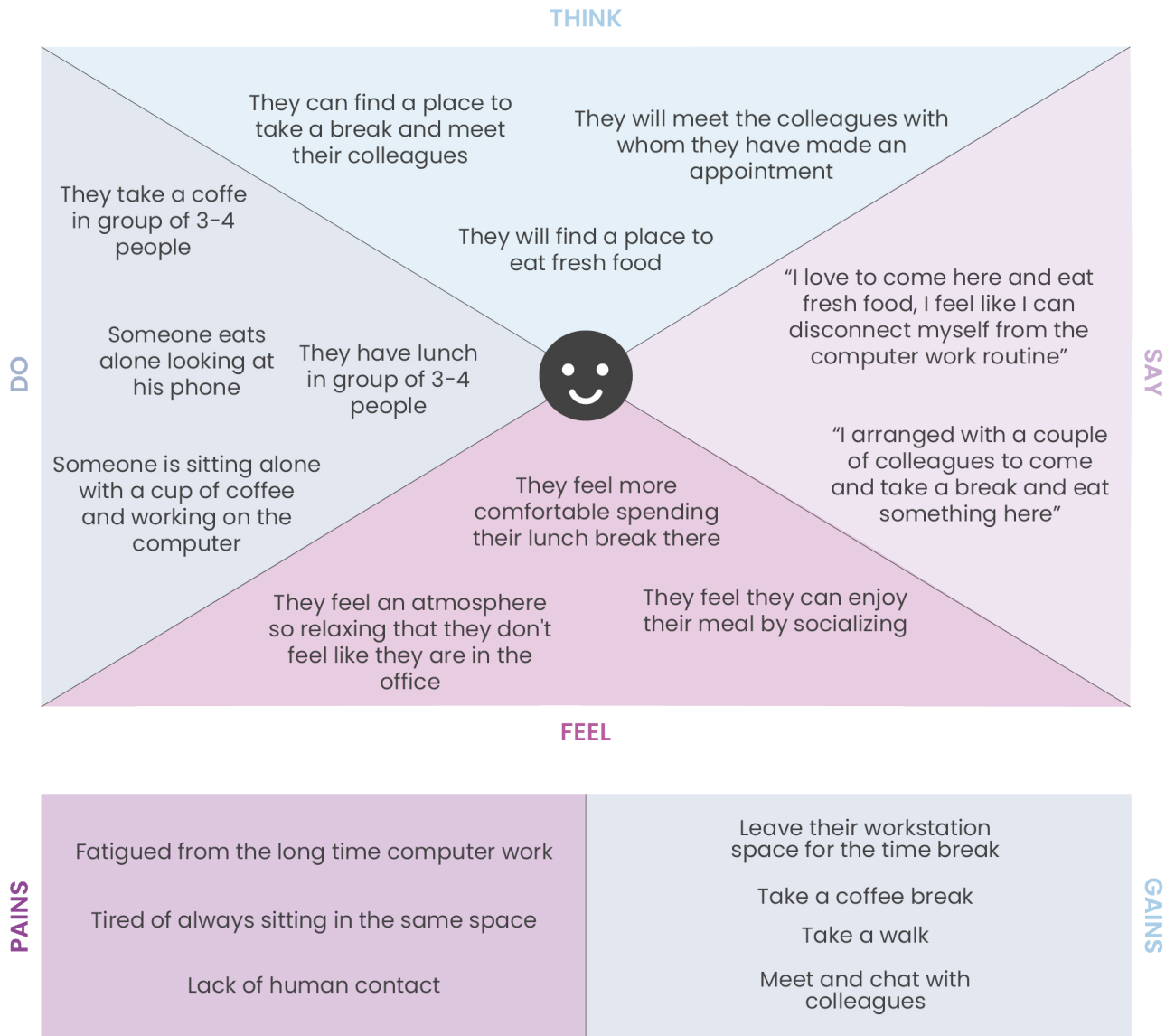


FIGURE 5.2.3 | Empathy Map created by organizing the information collected during the observation and the interviews

From the information collected we can see that the average employee seeks, during the break time, a space for restoring and a moment of leisure and social interaction, but also that this interaction is limited especially around the moment of eating, so the design challenge for this space could have focused on finding a way to satisfy the emerged need of human interaction through the choice of a suitable environmental branding strategy.

Therefore, the main goal of the branding strategy for the Network Cafe, taking into consideration the need of companies to strengthen the sense of belonging and the need of employees for social interaction, could be that to encourage communication and connection between people to support the idea of belonging to a community.



FIGURE 5.2.4 | Scheme that represents the matching of users' needs with the company's perspectives

STEP 3 | The ideation: strategy and experience definition

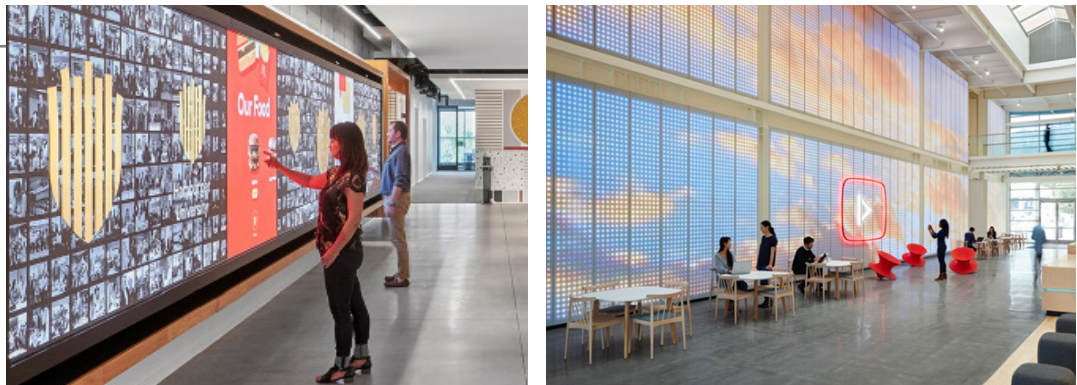
In this phase, it is necessary to define the *WHAT*, that is, what is intended to design, by defining the features of the experience according to the objective to achieve.

In our case, the main goal to achieve is the promotion of participation and social interaction; to reach this objective, it is necessary to find a way to encourage an active and participatory fruition of that space, letting the people have a direct experience of the purpose for which the organization wanted them to live the space.

As we have learned from the reference case studies, one of the solutions that can be implemented to create a space that supports an active participation of the experience proposed for that place, is the solution of adding a layer of interactivity.

FIGURE 5.2.5

Collection of cases in which the interaction branding solution has proposed an active participation of the space. In the order: McDonald's Global Headquarters and YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby



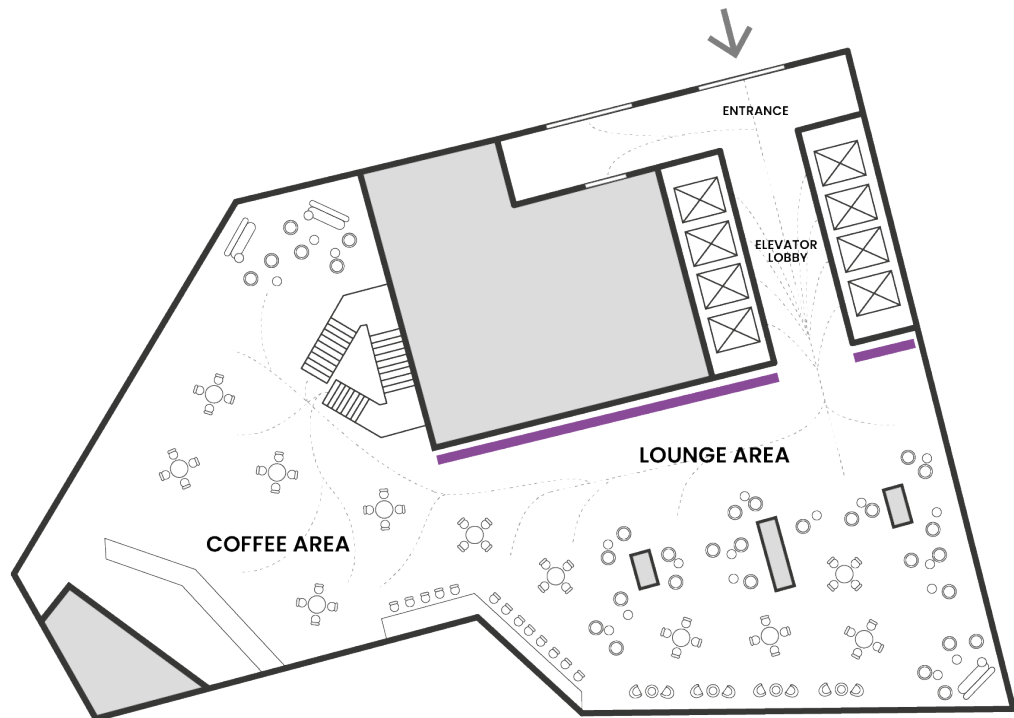
In this case, to support the values promoted by Accenture and to follow the case study findings emerged, in relation with the topic of environmental branding for offices, I opted to choose a digital interactive touchpoint.

After having defined the touchpoint and the environmental branding strategy, now its time to settle all the experience around it: the type of interaction, the features, the format and the structure.

Once you understand the flows in the space and the type of environmental branding touchpoint that you want to create, it is necessary to identify a significant point where to place the interactive touchpoint, with the purpose to attract the user's attention at a glance.

FIGURE 5.2.6

Flow study scheme and definition of the touchpoint for the digital interactive moment



Subsequently, it is necessary to develop a solution that is impactful and visible enough to capture the visitor's attention. To do this, this solution have to characterize the space in such a way as to make it recognizable and memorable by its users.

With these premises, I looked for a solution in the case studies that could respond to these objectives, and I found that the majority of digital interactive installations that involved user's interaction have similar characteristics: made up of large screens, touch or movement responsive and displaying often abstract, dynamic and ever changing contents.

Therefore, a solution that encompasses all these characteristics has resulted in the practical choice of using a LED wall that represents dynamic and captivating colours.



FIGURE 5.2.7 | What the environment might look like and the case study to which it is referred

The next step was to find a way to trigger an action and arousing curiosity in the user; inspired by the solution found by the ESI Designers group for Terrell Place (Washington DC, 2016), I decided to opt for the addition of proximity sensors to manage movements of the colour texture represented on the LED wall, with the aim of pointing out to the user that its presence causes a change in the state of the space, as well as its individuality brings added value to the community.

This solution was also conceived to represent in a metaphorical way, how is the participation and the presence of the single individual, that make up a community. The purpose is to let the user notice the change he made with his passage, in such a way that he is intrigued and that this alteration in the environment can trigger his attention and pushes him to get closer.

The idea is to make the user reach a proximity to the display such as to activate, through the proximity sensors collected data, the appearance of a catching phrase. A similar solution has been proposed in the case study designed by Valerio Dewalt for YouTube 901 Cherry Lobby in San Bruno.



FIGURE 5.2.8 | Demonstration of how the interaction can take place and the case study to which it is referred

This call to action will allow people to randomly open a direct communication channel with the same environment of another Accenture office in the world equipped with the same technology.



FIGURE 5.2.9 | Representation of the solution that will support the interaction and connection between people

The inspiration for this type of remote communication comes from a media artwork, that I met during my studies and that affected me a lot, it is a 3-days media art installation implemented on a November evening in 1980.

Hole-In-Space was, in the intention of the artists Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, a "Public Communication Sculpture", through which, people walking past the Lincoln Center in New York City, and "The Broadway" department store located in Century City (Los Angeles), had a surprising encounter with each other.

In this large screen, people could see, hear, and speak as if encountering each other on the same sidewalk. *Hole-In-Space* had the power to cancel the distance between far cities, like a "space portal", in an age where video calls didn't exist yet.

FIGURE 5.2.10

Galloway, Kit;
Rabinowitz,
Sherrie, «Hole in
Space», 1980
Photography:
© Galloway,
Kit; Rabinowitz,
Sherrie



The thing that interested me most about this concept and that I wanted to bring back to the project, was the type of remote interaction: an unintended interaction that develops completely random connections, as happens in reality in a natural and unplanned way, by living physical spaces.

The aim is to bring back in the office a spontaneous communication path, where an employee can have a chance to run into another colleague and take advantage of that time to connect with each other in a more natural and organic way, without the structures of a fixed and programmed meeting.

The choice of this type of interaction was dictated by the aim of encouraging the creation of connections between Accenture employees, in an incidental and genuine way; the goal was supported through two strategies: the main one is the one that allows, interacting with the LED wall, the opening of a direct communication channel with Accenture employees around the world. The second, allows, in a "silent" way, through the changes of the representations displayed, to highlight the human presence within the environment, so as to transmit a positive message about the approach of people: the more people are present and interact with each other, the more the LED wall will offer changes and plays of colour.

How to bring digital interaction design into an environmental branding project

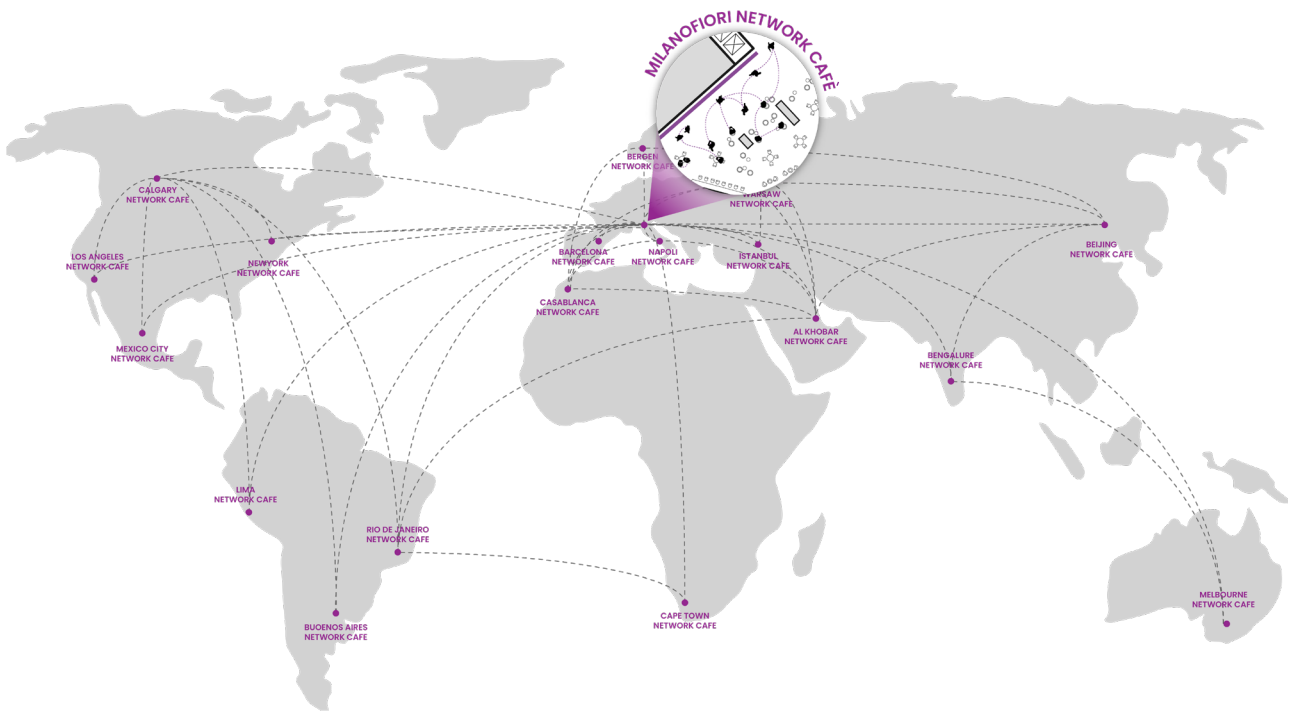


FIGURE 5.2.11 | Representation of the social interaction occurring locally and globally

Furthermore, since the play of colours on the screen is controlled by people’s movements, they could decide to interact and collaborate with each other to consciously cause a change in the LED wall, thus also favouring interaction between people in the physical space.

Finally, the so-called after-experience was also taken into consideration to motivate the use of space by users in the long term, thinking of a schedule of animations that vary over time and the opening of the global broadcast channel that randomly change day by day.



FIGURE 5.2.12 | An example of pattern variations to display on the LED wall, respecting the Accenture brand guidelines

To get an overview of the storytelling of the proposed scenario the FIG. 5.2.13 illustrates the employee's journey experiencing the branding installation within the Network Café.

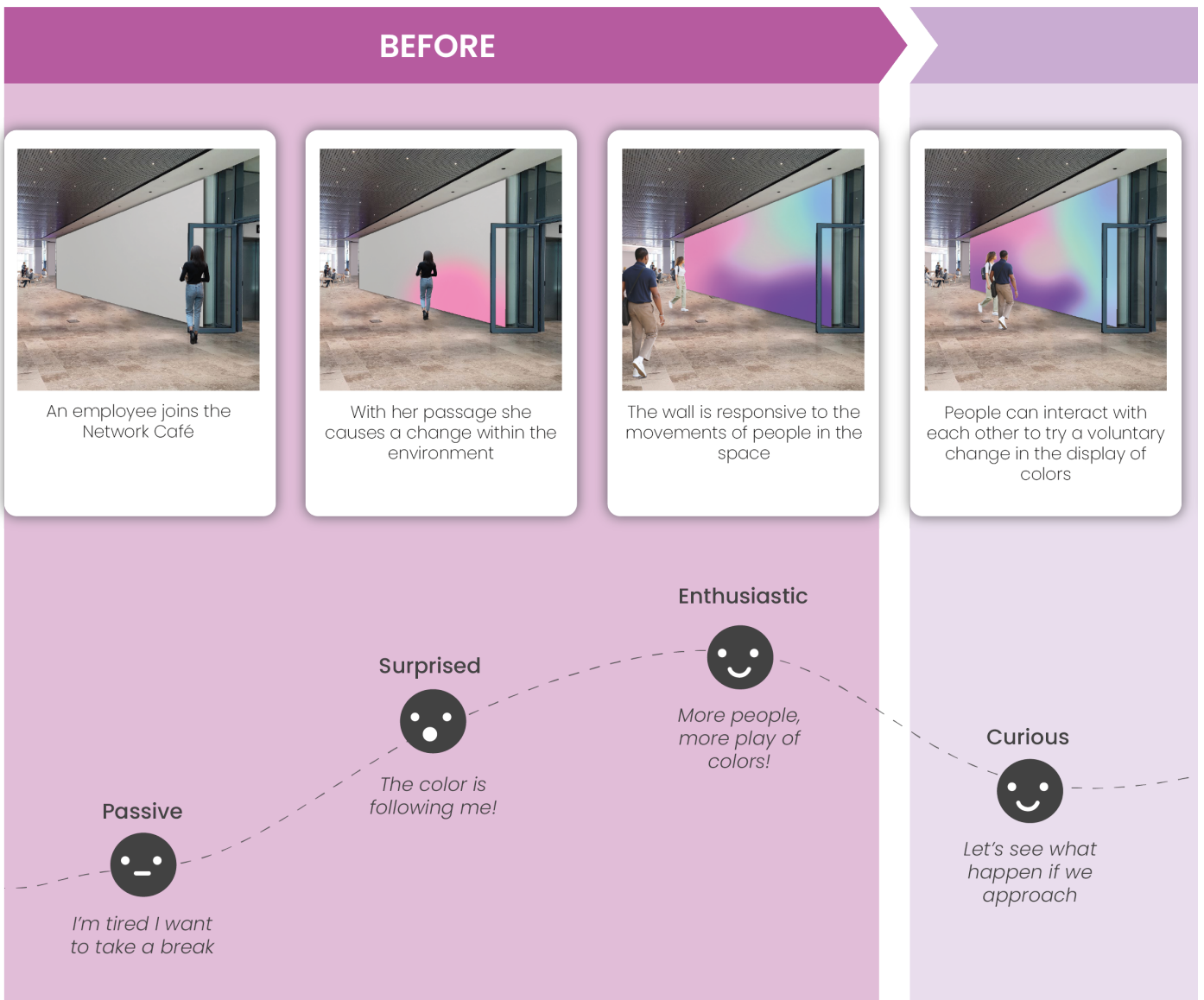




FIGURE 5.2.13 | Employee experience map interacting with the branding touchpoint within the Network Café

Once defined the experience to convey through the environmental branding’s intervention, it is necessary to outline the *HOW*; that concerns with the definition of how the experience is distributed: through which technologies and which forms of interaction.

This interactive digital branding element, has been thought as a responsive video wall in the form of a LED wall, that respond to the presence of people in the space, through the collection of data in real time via motion and proximity sensors. The installation will include an internet connection, video cameras, speakers and microphones; that will be activated in the moment in which the proximity data detected, trigger the live connection broadcast with the other installation equipped with the same technologies in another Accenture location.

Below, in detail the specifications related to the interaction between the digital interactive touchpoint and the user.

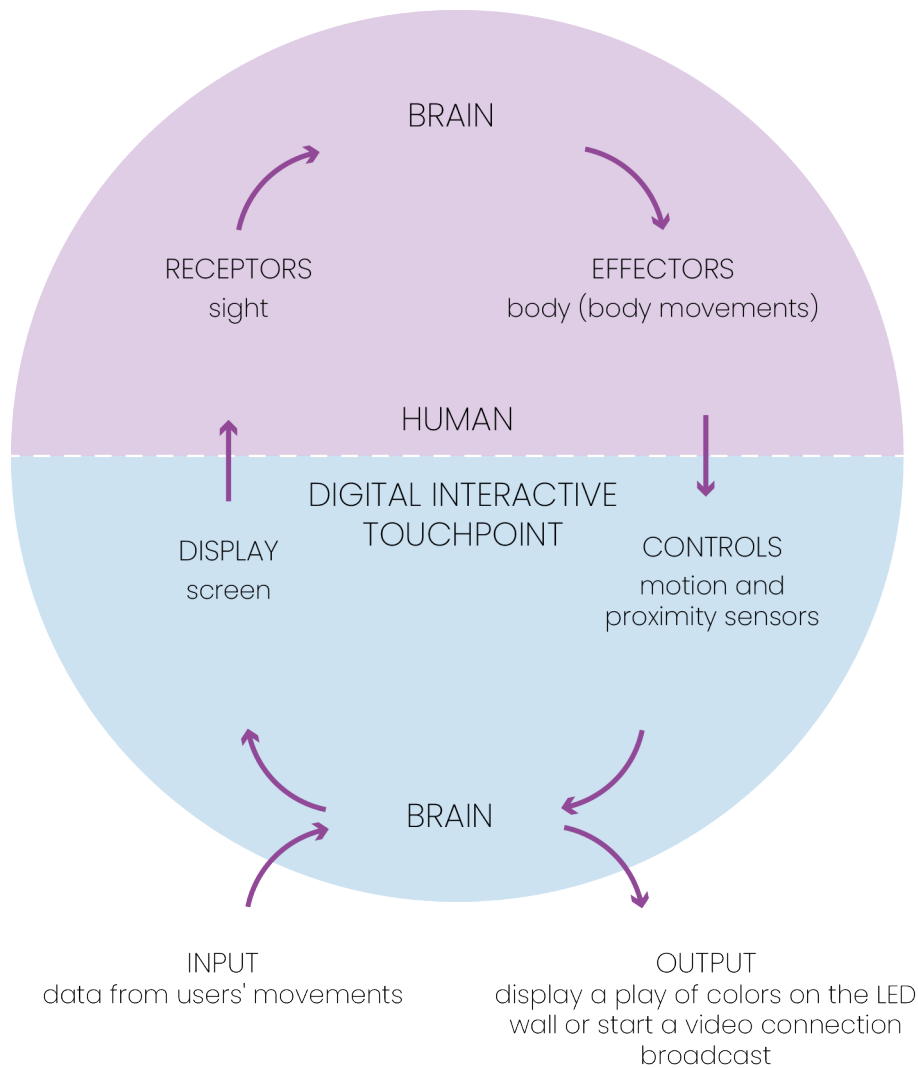


FIGURE 5.2.14 | The frame of interaction between the person and the interactive touchpoint

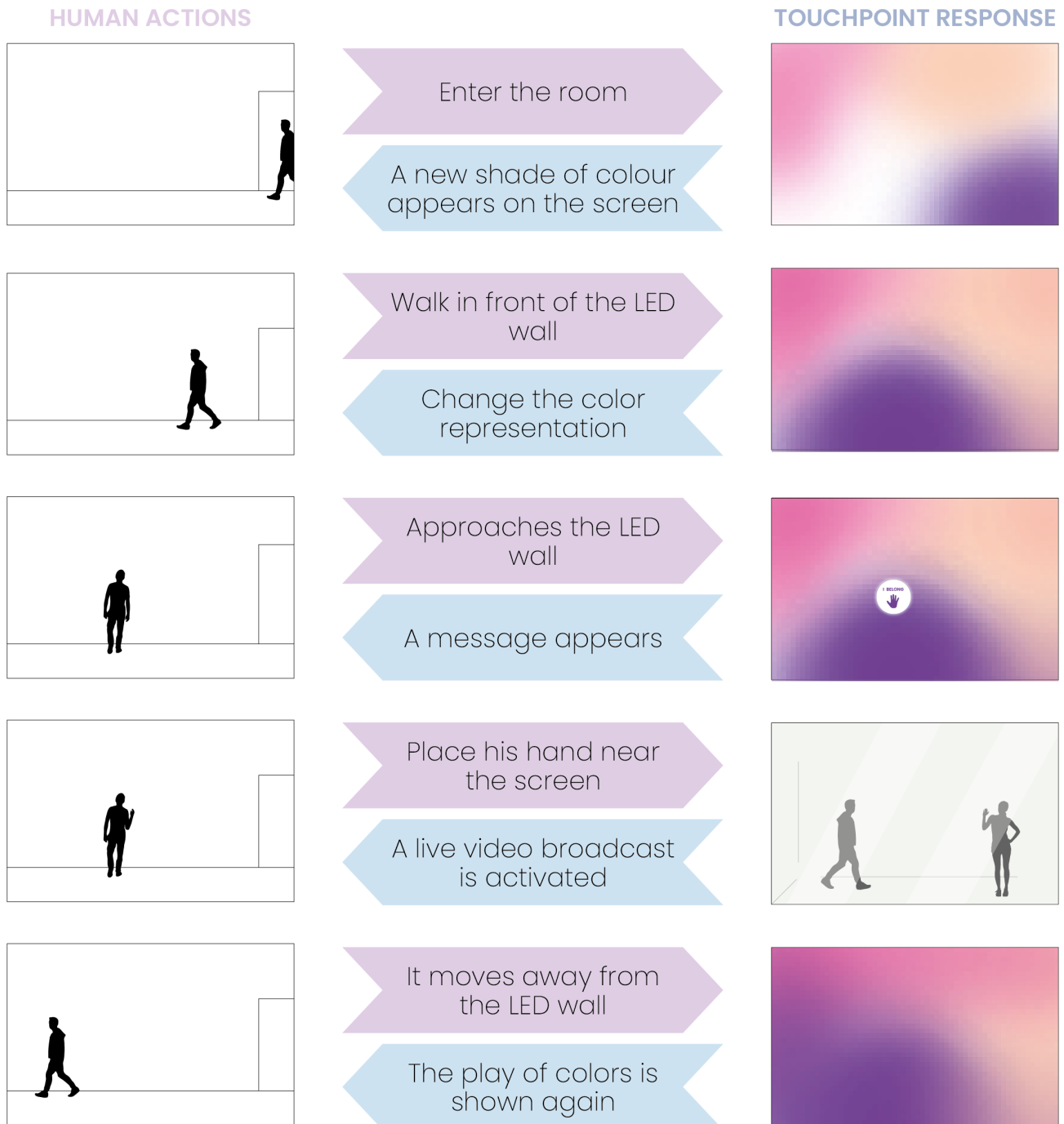
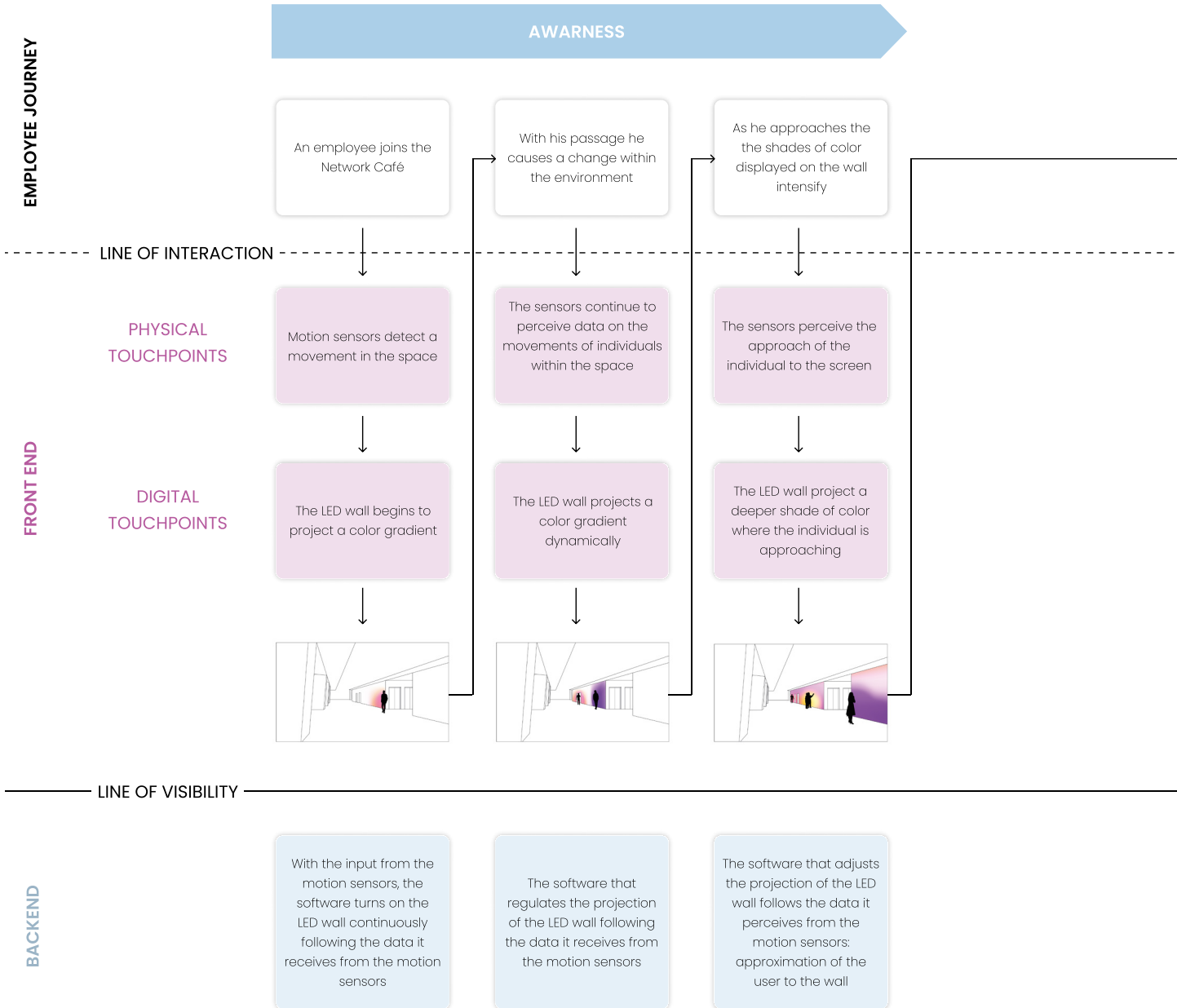


FIGURE 5.2.15 | Framing the interaction: human actions and interactive touchpoint's response step by step

To better understand the experience's storyline of the concept scenario proposal; the journey of the employee within the Network Café combined with the interaction with the identified interactive touchpoints, is proposed below, step by step, in detail.



How to bring digital interaction design into an environmental branding project

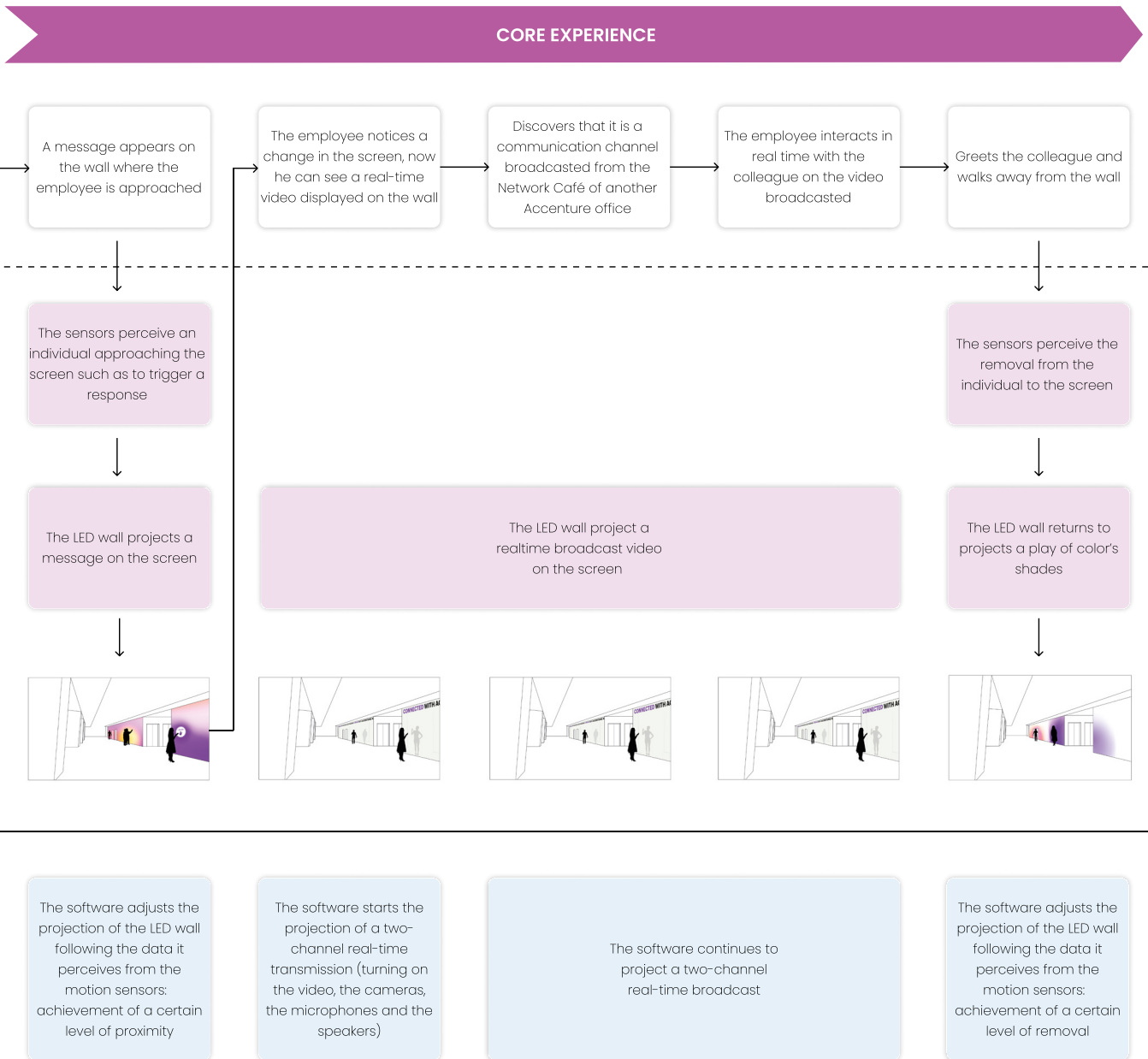


FIGURE 5.2.16 | Employee journey map interacting with the digital interaction branding touchpoint

Further steps for validation and implementation

At this point, the next steps should have been dedicated to the validation of this concept, showing the proposal in the form of a prototype to the company and testing the solution with future users, in order to collect feedbacks on the usability and its way of interaction and verify the real feasibility of the solution proposed. Furthermore, interviews or focus groups should have been organized to understand users' impressions and their degree of acceptance and understanding of the concept, with the purpose of verifying the satisfaction of their needs and requests, in order to be able to make changes and implementations before the final delivery.

In this stage of the study it was necessary for me, before implementing a prototyping and validation phase, to verify and validate with my work team at Accenture, the results obtained from the research in relation to the use of digital interaction design to strengthen the sense of belonging through environmental branding.

Therefore, I organized a meeting with the work team, showing them the research findings that led me to define an alternative to the way in which they usually work on environmental branding interventions at Accenture.

The purpose of the meeting was to understand the reasons why this opportunity to convey the sense of belonging through environmental branding had not been considered at Accenture; and consequently, understand if this modality could actually be implemented in the future.

The opinion emerged from the team was generally positive, defining the concept as innovative and in line with the values that the company transmits; but at the same time, they were very critical in relation to the feasibility of this type of solution applied to environmental branding in Accenture.

In the first place, the criticality emerged in relation to the management of decision-making complexities within a large company such as Accenture, where decisions are never made exclusively by few people and it is necessary to interact with multiple groups and at various decision-making levels, therefore projects often collide with these complexities and are set aside for budget or representation reasons.

Secondly, it emerged that the purpose of environmental branding at Accenture is to unilaterally communicate the values and image of the brand within the environments. Taking into consideration the fact that being a consulting company, its environment and communication are not considered to play an important role in influencing creativity and motivation of employee's work, also in relation to the fact that the Accenture's employee use the office environment as a support base to interface with their customer and usually working directly in their customer's company office.

In fact, Accenture's core business is to sell the skills of its resources to external customers; thus, the most characteristic spaces of the environments on which Accenture's branding communication is focused, are those dedicated to the customer, considered as showcase spaces where the customer is put in the first place, in order to show him the services and the values offered by the company.

Therefore, the actual environmental branding direction at Accenture turns out to be a choice of the type of branding identity that doesn't want to communicate that part of belonging, community and storytelling through the office branding; instead, it prefers to communicate that values through other types of channels such as social platforms, newsletters and initiatives.

On the other hand, they say that this proposed scenario could be interesting more on a global level, in particular, in such location that they call Innovation Center. This locations, are part of a sort of micro networks within the company itself, as a type of headquarters exclusively dedicated to technological innovation experiences for customers; located in several part of the world, in these particular centers of innovation, the desire to stay in touch and feel part of this network of innovation within the company, has always been a point of interest.


In fact, during my year of experience in the environmental branding team in Accenture, it has often happened that, once a new office has been opened and the branding intervention concluded; several teams within Accenture, as it happened for the Cybersecurity team in Milan and the Interactive team in Rome, have come to ask us, as responsible of the environmental branding interventions, to be able to have further specific customizations of the spaces and branding communication to best represents their own identity.




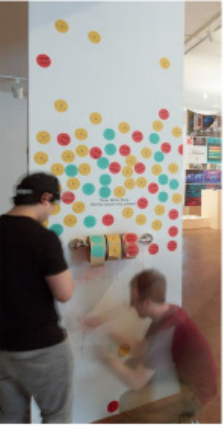
Below, I have reported some slide of the presentation, that show the solutions proposed in response to the requests advanced by the Interactive team in Rome; that asked for the implementation of elements of interaction and involvement, that would allow them to express themselves, spreading the community's culture, making them feel part of something bigger and encouraging their motivation and creativity.

Custom, narrative and interactive spaces

Culture Spread Wall

A place to share cultural experiences, interact with colleagues and find sources of inspiration



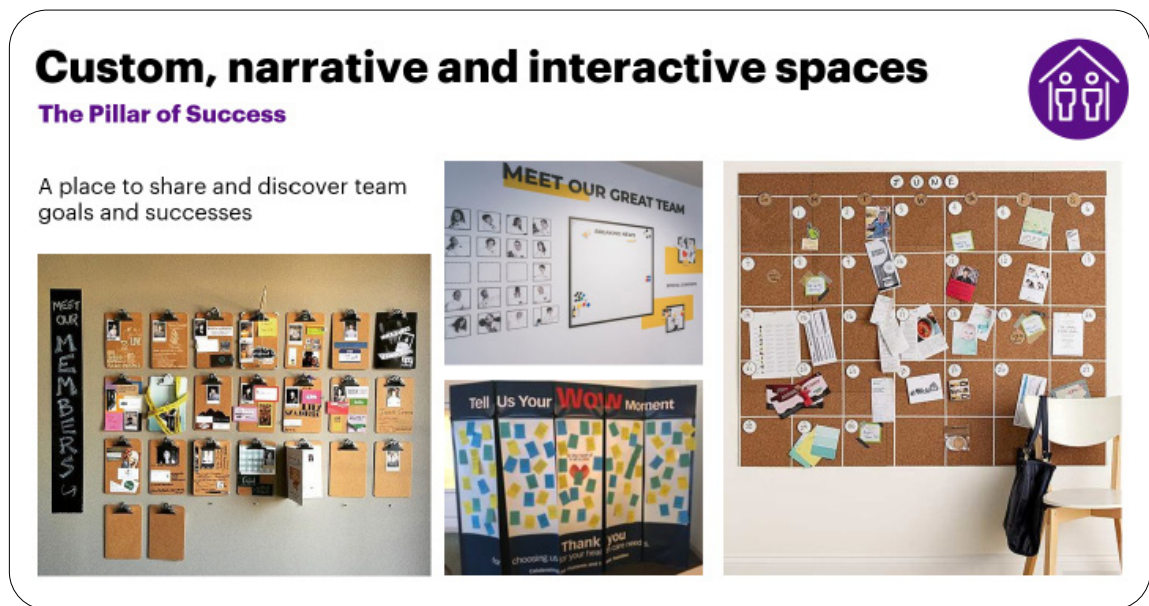


FIGURE 5.2.17 | A couple of slides that show the proposals provided to the requests advanced by the Interactive team in Rome

Therefore, I personally believe that the weak point of Accenture's current branding strategy, that does not allow to take advantage of the opportunity to express the sense of belonging and identity, as instead emerged from the research; is the application of a generalized and non-dedicated approach; specifically for the different types of employees who work internally, who instead often bring out desires and needs that are far from those imposed by the environmental branding guidelines.

CONCLUSIONS

This study had the objective of investigating the possibility of exploiting digital interaction design solutions applied to environmental branding for offices, with the aim of strengthening the employee's sense of belonging to the company.

The inquiry was born from the curiosity to understand the reasons that support the use of the practice of environmental branding applied to the office environment.

Through the research, it has been shown that the current period of crisis has led to a need in people to look for stable points to refer to and that this has strongly influenced the perception of the work experience causing, due to the forced removal, a weakening of the communication and employee-company interaction; that has caused a impairment of a fundamental factor in the productivity and the engagement of the employee in their work: the sense of belonging.

Going deeper into the topic of the sense of belonging, it emerged that this subject referred to the work environment describes a feeling of safety and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion and recognition; and that therefore, to make people feel as if they belong, the work experience must be designed to allow people to feel part of something that is significant for them and in which their commitment is valued as essential.

These feelings of integration into a community, into a place where they can express themselves authentically, feel heard, welcomed and motivated, can be defined as the drivers of the so-called employee sense of belonging.

These drivers are more effectively supported when the work experience takes place within the physical office space, where physical proximity with colleagues and with the organization itself, favors spontaneous and quality interaction and connection.

Considering the fact that natural communication and interaction are considered an essential basis for keeping employees interested and engaged; employees tend to value quality time with their organization and their colleagues when they see links between their own values and the values of their organization, in that situation they are more inclined to be engaged.

This is the reason that led me to think that companies, to re-establish that connection, that sense of participation and belonging between employee and their working reality, should try to physically bring their employees back to an office that is capable of communicating a network of shared knowledge, ideas and values; capable of generating a shared cultural base in which employees can recognize themselves and feel safe and valued in it.

Therefore, by combining the information that emerged from the research with the experience as an environmental branding designer, the intuition that was supported in the thesis is that this channel of environmental branding in office spaces can actively support the drivers of the sense of belonging, going to strengthen it.

Thus, the research was deepened in the direction of environmental branding applied to office spaces with the aim of strengthening the sense of belonging of employees towards the company; starting from an in-depth description of the environmental branding strategy adopted by Accenture, through the collection and the analysis of case studies; the study investigated how other companies were dealing with the issue.

Subsequently a definition of the practice of environmental branding applied to office environments was given, through the highlighting of what motivations and necessities drive companies to undertake an environmental branding intervention for their offices, what the realization process consists of and what are the principles on which this practice is based.

Analyzing the environmental branding strategies, especially in relation to the sense of belonging, the use of interactive digital solutions, emerged as an innovative direction for this practice.

In fact, this new direction would have the ability to support the requirements of the sense of belonging through environmental branding in a more agile and effective way.

It is for this reason that, by comparing the environmental branding strategy I experienced at Accenture with the interactive digital direction that this practice can undertake to support the sense of belonging, I found a space of evolutionary opportunity for Accenture's environmental branding.

At the end of the thesis, to demonstrate the values and benefits that digital interaction can bring through environmental branding in strengthening the sense of belonging in the workplace, starting from a project case carried out at Accenture, a branding scenario was defined as an alternative to the strategy used by the environmental branding team at Accenture; and it was afterwards proposed and shown to the team.

From the feedback received, it has emerged that consulting companies such as Accenture, do not consider necessary to communicate the sense of belonging through the channel of environmental branding given the generalized nature of the consultancy work; but it also came out that at the same time, for certain work groups, these needs are emerging and that it would therefore be interesting to exploit this direction of branding in some specific Accenture's work areas such as: in the innovation, the design and the technological services field.

This last consideration goes to consolidate the need, on the part of the employee, to find a self dedicated workspace that reflects the identity and the values shared with those of the company for which he works.

Therefore, a key to increase the sense of belonging of employees is to rethink the role of offices in an employee-centered perspective, creating a pleasant work environment that allows direct employee-system's organization communication and that fosters interaction, inclusion and participation in the community working life; and that all this can be easily achieved through environmental branding interventions that include digital interaction design solutions.

Further implementation for this study

Further insights to support the thesis could go in the direction of validating a digital interaction environmental branding intervention scenario, through the prototyping of a pilot solution created starting from an in-depth analysis of a targeted employees group and their working context. Thus, afterwards testing whether this strategy can actually be an opportunity in the long term, to strengthen the sense of belonging and bring added value to the work experience.

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