

The Exchange: A Look Into How the Coffee Shop Environment, Body Language, and
Interactions are Uniquely Influential to this Business

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Coffee shops are becoming more popular in today's society for their multipurpose spaces. Why is this so? What unique aspects of this space allow customers to be so productive and successful? We set out to answer this question by observing a popular cafe in the local community near our campus. The Exchange is a luxurious cafe located in DePere, Wisconsin that offers coffee, food, and mercantile. Their mission is to "elevate the senses and inspire the soul" ("You Deserve to Feel Inspired," n.d.). The business is inclusive to all and firmly believes in helping the local community. They partner with local roasters, provide different foods and drinks for all diets and allergies, and sell goods to fund recovery for sex trafficking survivors in Wisconsin. After observing The Exchange, we found that the environment, body language, and interactions all uniquely exhibited within a coffee shop. Therefore, we are researching the question: How are the environment, body language, and interactions of people within the Exchange uniquely influential to those that visit this location?

Methods

Content Observation and Notes

For the purpose of this study, the context observed was The Exchange in De Pere, Wisconsin. Detailed notes were taken about the environment, the body language of patrons, and interactions observed between patrons as well as with the staff. This location was chosen because of its close proximity to college campuses and many local businesses. A total of 9 hours were spent in the field observing (3 hours by each group member). Each individual observation was 1

hour long, occurring at separate times throughout a three week period. To maximize unique values of the observational experience, researchers went to the location on various weekdays. No two researchers were present at the same time as one another. General notes were typed in documents using laptops, detailing elements of The Exchange in real time. Each observation produced approximately 3-4 pages of notes per observer hour, amounting to a total of 27 pages single spaced with double spacing between paragraphs.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using coding. Multiple steps were taken to code the gathered data. First, we combined all of our notes onto three separate 27 page documents. Then, on each one of our 27 page long documents, we read through the transcripts several times, becoming familiar with the data. Once we had familiarized ourselves with the presented data, we met to discuss general findings. With those general findings in mind, we divided our research into three main topics: environment, body language, and interactions. Separately, on each of our 27 page long documents, we used different colors to highlight any excerpts related to the environment, body language, and interactions. Afterwards, we met up again to address our findings and organize them into appropriate themes.

Discussion Section

Environment

In today's society, our lives are moving at a faster pace than ever. Technology is evolving and changing the world around us. To accommodate these changes, we have begun to use certain businesses as multifunctional spaces. One of these businesses is coffee shops, whether they are

large chains or small and local. Coffee shops are spaces where one enjoys togetherness, time for reflection, business ideas or endeavors, and much more (Nautiyal, 2016). Creating an environment that can be used for both productivity and socializing has many factors involved. According to one study, some factors include location and atmosphere (Hashim et al, 2017).

Location

The location of a business is very important, as it can affect how many people come to it. Convenience is key in attracting customers in terms of location, and is sometimes more important than the business's brand itself (Hashim et al, 2017). The Exchange is located near St. Norbert College, so it attracts some college students, but is mainly frequented by locals. The location is pretty convenient, but could be better. It feels a bit hidden from a large portion of the community, but is very accessible to the college campus. One convenience factor of where it is located includes plenty of parking either on the street or in the small lot attached to the building. However, what really attracts people to The Exchange is the atmosphere.

Atmosphere

According to research, if a business has a good atmosphere, it makes the customers stay longer and increases their impulse purchases (Hashim et al, 2017). What makes up the atmosphere is the ambience, aesthetic design, and social factors. The Exchange has all three of these elements, which is why the business is so successful. It is a very inviting place open for everyone in the community.

Ambience

The ambience of a place includes the temperature, lighting, music, and scent (Hashim et al, 2017). The lighting in the coffee shop is very warm toned, which makes the atmosphere more inviting and cozy, rather than harsh and cold. There also is plenty of natural light coming in from big windows lining the wall of the lower level, as well as a sky light in the middle of the building. The music is playing at the right volume so that customers can hear the melody, but it is not overbearing. Conversations are easy to understand while people who are working can still focus. We describe the music as “modern but vibey” - typical instrumental coffee shop soundtracks with a slow tempo. We can hear baristas talking behind the counter, as well as dishes and glass rattling. The noise level in general gets loud, but not so loud that people at work lose focus. The noise can easily be drowned out if necessary. We found the obvious scent of coffee grounds, which was not overwhelming by any means. When food is brought out the delicious smell lingers. There is also a slight oaky smell throughout the building due to the vast amount of woodwork.

Aesthetic Design

The aesthetic design includes the layout, comfort, and privacy of the business (Hashim et al, 2017). The Exchange has a unique layout that promotes different types of uses of the space. Overall, the coffee shop has a modern industrial look to it that we found to be quite moody and masculine, but sophisticated as well. There are dark wood tones throughout the coffee shop with accents of black and gold. Everything inside the establishment looked very cohesive and purposeful. After the design of the place, the most interesting aspect of the Exchange is its variety of spaces in general. There are many different types of tables and seating for people, which goes along with the typical coffee shop these days - it is multifunctional. The coffee shop

offers booths, circle tables, rectangular tables for large groups, small tables for one person to sit at, high tables with stools, and even high chairs for infants and small children to use. They even have leather couches and chairs in the corners, too. The first level is used mainly for socializing over a cup of coffee or brunch with some individual seating attached to the walls, while the upstairs area is designated for a more work friendly zone.

We also noticed how comfortable customers felt in the space. Many people knew exactly where they wanted to sit, which seemed to suggest that they are frequent customers. This shows that people come to the Exchange over and over and that it is popular in the community. Even people sitting alone do not look uneasy or uncomfortable to be there by themselves. Everyone looks happy and seems to be enjoying themselves. Many people take pictures of themselves, their group, or the place in general. The baristas help with the comfort level, as they have a great relationship with customers and seem to have the same people working every day for familiarity.

The darkness of the black walls and moody theme give the sense of privacy even for individuals positioned in the most exposed areas. The separation of the levels creates a sense of different rooms, which breaks up the establishment a bit. There are also booths on the lower level that are private enough to go unnoticed. The coffee shop has two areas of couches that are oriented in a way that sections them off from the rest of the space. If these options are not private enough, there is a room available for reservations online in advance as well.

Social Factors

The social factor includes the crowds inside the business. At The Exchange, there is always a large number of people that tables can be hard to find. We found that many locals

frequent the place, all with a similar clothing style. Though there is a large age group that come and enjoy the coffee shop, many people dress on a spectrum of sophisticated and casual to nice casual. There seem to be many leggings, jeans, sweaters, boots, hats, formal jackets, etc. Some even dress in professional outfits for business meetings. There are a few outliers, of course, but most people dress the same to match the vibe of the place.

Body Language

When it comes to the body language that people exhibit within a coffee shop environment, the Exchange fosters many different responses from its patrons. As found during multiple observations at this location, body language could be interpreted across a wide spectrum. While some patrons presented tense body language, others appeared relaxed and comfortable. With such a wide array of attitudinal behaviors found at the Exchange, a key takeaway from these observations is that this location provides an atmosphere where visitors can freely express their attitudes and emotions through body language.

Body language allows individuals to communicate information through nonverbal signals (Mandal, 2014), which can be done intentionally and unintentionally. Though we may not always realize it, we are constantly encoding our own body language and decoding nonverbal signals in the body language of those around us (Mandal, 2014). Individuals who were observed at the Exchange were found to exhibit both open and closed off body language depending on the activities they were performing - whether that meant working on homework, conducting business meetings, or simply socializing with friends. As a space that provided an appropriate environment for any of these activities, the Exchange offered a vast subject pool to observe the associated body language behaviors.

Posture

Posture is an aspect of body language that varied greatly from one individual to another within the Exchange. Patrons who sat in the cushioned chairs and couches at each corner of the downstairs level were noted as appearing *comfortable* and *reclined* while those at tables or booths exhibited a wider range of posture which varied from *hunched over* to *upright*.

Physical Distance

Physical distance between patrons as well as between patrons and staff within the Exchange was also noted several times throughout the observations. It was found that individuals who seemed familiar with their companions would lean into the conversation at hand. Those who were interpreted to be couples were noted to sit at closer proximity to one another with greater touch ratios than patrons who were interpreted as friends or colleagues. Likewise, familial relationships as described in several parental/child interactions resulted in higher physical interaction and less distance.

Position Shifts

Research by Mandal on nonverbal communication found that men make more seating position shifts than women do (Mandal, 2014). Because the focus of our present observations was not rooted in gender, there were no significant differences noted between male and female position shifts. Rather, body language was observed in an overarching sense throughout observations. Notable position shifts included adjusting in seats, changing hand positions from folded to relaxed (among other hand shifts), placing elbows on the table and then moving them elsewhere, and so on. Regardless of what an individual was doing and whether or not they were

alone or with company, position shifts were commonly made by all who were observed at the Exchange.

Facial Expressions

Mandal's research also found that women showed more facial expressions than men (Mandal, 2014). Again, the observations made in this project did not focus on gender and so there was not an emphasis made during the observation process to distinguish which gender engaged in certain behaviors more than others. That being said, the facial expressions exhibited at the Exchange are still a notable feature of the body language aspect of this location. Expressions were described across a spectrum from glum to excited. Those engaged in work on their devices were most notably reported to be focused, while those engaging in conversation were described to be more animated and pleasant. Another notable observation was the expressions of the employees within the Exchange, who were described predominantly as being friendly.

Interactions

Interactions are an integral part of our everyday lives as humans. Undoubtedly, we interact with each other in a variety of different ways. Concurrent with research, the most notable interactions at the Exchange were between baristas and customers as well as between patrons themselves. As Waxman (2008) notes, being part of the social climate of the coffee shop is the support provided by the staff to other staff, the staff to the patrons, and the patrons to each other. In fact, the supportive group of acquaintances brought to people by coffee shops even enhances their overall well-being (Waxman, 2008). Such an establishment has been noted in research as a

place to meet, for leisurely consumption, and to do business (Cleave, 2017). Therefore, coffee shops can be understood as a ‘third place.’ According to Mimoun and Gruen (2021), a third place is a social space that provides users with social experiences and relationships outside of their homes and workspaces. Traditionally, such third places value bringing people together (Mimoun & Gruen, 2021). These values can be seen through the various interactions at the Exchange.

Between Baristas and Customers

First and foremost, the baristas at the exchange were energetic, friendly, and approachable. Their energy shined through their expressive words, tone, and volume. However, observation variations showed that on weekends the baristas appeared more sluggish and tired than during the weekdays. For the most part though, whenever they interacted with a customer, they would initiate eye contact and display kind smiles. When customers struggled to make a decision on what to order, the baristas would give considerate advice. Sometimes the baristas would engage in conversation with those sitting at the bar area. One barista even made a point to walk around to each table and ask the customers how their food and drinks were to ensure satisfaction. When there is a climate of trust, respect, and autonomy established, people feel welcome and able to be themselves. Therefore, this creates a motive for customers to frequent a location, like the Exchange. A customer who patronizes a coffee shop on a daily basis noted that trust is an important aspect of the business, knowing the workers care about you helps establish a sense of safety within the place (Waxman, 2008).

This genuine interest that the baristas take in the customers contributes to their overall sense of outstanding service. Service has been noted in research to be an intangible component that contributes to one’s appeal and sensory experience within the environment (Cleave, 2017).

Knowing this, it should not be surprising that third places, like coffee shops, create value for their customers by fostering communities and friendships, as well as by providing health support and leisure like the Exchange does (Mimoun & Gruen, 2021). Furthermore, in congruence with past literature, the value of third places depends on their ability to create meanings of community, localness, and belonging (Mimoun & Gruen, 2021). Consumers internalize these senses and determine if their needs of the space are met.

One undeniable note on how the sense of community, localness, and belonging is showcased at the Exchange was that there are many regular customers who frequent the coffee shop. Undoubtedly, the baristas seem to know these customers, creating that sense of community, localness, and belonging. When they interact, they address each other by their first names and talk as if they are friends, conversing about menial topics. Through such interactions, the customers are able to internalize these senses which meet their needs, encouraging them to come back time and time again. Yet, it is also important to note that there are some newcomers who visit the Exchange, too. For those who appeared to be new to the coffee shop, the baristas still treated such customers with similar hospitality to establish the sense of community localness, and belonging within these newfound visitors.

Between Patrons

Given that one customer need fulfilled by coffee shops is the social need, creating a space to meet with others, interactions between patrons were also a topic of interest (Mimoun & Gruen, 2021). First, even though the vast majority of the customers at the Exchange were college-aged students and young adults, a vast age range has been found represented here. For students in particular, the coffee shop grants them a place to be productive as an alternative to the library

(Waxman, 2008). This is in part because in a coffee shop, patrons can drink coffee, people watch, take a break, and have a conversation (Waxman, 2008). It was apparent that most customers intentionally met up with their counterparts at the Exchange, but a fair amount of customers also happened to run into each other out of pure coincidence. This is no surprise because research shows that such establishments have a long history as meeting places and for providing refreshments (Cleave, 2017). Patrons either sat in groups of two or more or on their own. Most often, if the customers sat in a group of more than two, they were conversing in casual conversation over a drink or a meal. When in these types of social situations, the parties were attentive to one another, leaning into the conversation, very clearly interested in what the other person had to say. These customers talked at a conversational volume while sometimes conversing in a more hushed or exaggerated volume, but this was rare.

Conversely, if the customers sat on their own, which was not socially acceptable until the nineteenth century, they were nearly always engrossed in their work (Cleave, 2017). If groups of people were working on something, they worked separately on their own devices, saying very little to one another. Most often, this work was enacted on a laptop or some other technological device. Still, very few read hard copied books or studied other materials while on their own.

Conclusion

The welcoming factors of the Exchange's environment are influenced by the interactions and body language of other patrons as well as staff to create an atmosphere that is appealing to newcomers and encouraging for return customers. Through observation and analysis of the Exchange as well as previous research, we were able to determine how the environment, body language, and interactions of people specifically in this location are uniquely influential. Overall,

we learned that all of these factors are interrelated. The environment, body language, and interactions of people are all dependent on each other in order to create a business that consumers want to visit often. This idea relates to our thesis because having a warm and welcoming environment is enjoyable and keeps people coming back. By caring for their customers and local community, the Exchange creates this multipurpose space that today's society loves so much.

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