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EXPERIENCING ART IN THE WORKPLACE VS. EMPLOYER BRANDING AND HUMAN CAPITAL

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Purpose: The research strategy employed is a critical analysis of source literature in the fields of human resource management, employer branding, and the art market. The research methods utilized in this article also include the diagnosis of the current state and prospects of using art in human capital management and its impact on the employer brand, as well as the method of synthesis regarding the construction of conclusions in both the epistemological and pragmatic spheres.
Methodology: The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach focused on the interpretation of meanings. It posits that phenomena such as employee aesthetic experience and employer branding require a humanistic lens. The research integrates perspectives from cultural economics, management sciences, and occupational psychology.
Findings: The results indicate that experiencing art in the workplace strengthens the humanistic element in HRM and employer branding by building a unique employee experience based on cultural and sensory values. This facilitates: the creation of a positive employer image, increased employee engagement, the development of soft skills, and the shaping of organizational culture.
Research limitations: The issue is broad and multifaceted; this article addresses only the primary problems regarding the impact of art on organizational processes. Due to technical limitations, the focus remains on a conceptual model. Future research should include empirical verification of the proposed relationships.
Social implications: The article offers an innovative proposal for executives, HR managers, and employer branding specialists. Introducing art into organizational spaces can be an effective tool for improving the quality of life for employees and fostering a more culturally aware society.
Originality/value: The article addresses an original and rarely explored topic. Its uniqueness lies in the interdisciplinary treatment of human capital management processes. Treating art as a strategic element of employer branding remains a pioneer niche in Poland, bridging the gap between the economics of culture and management sciences.
Keywords: art banking, employer branding, human capital, art market.
Category of the paper: Conceptual paper, literature review.

1. Introduction

This article addresses the issue of experiencing art through the introduction of its visual forms (including paintings, photographs, sculptures, and artistic installations) into the corporate environment. The existing body of literature emphasizes that, in the contemporary world, competitive advantage is increasingly less derived solely from financial or technological capital, and more frequently from the quality of employees' competencies, organizational culture, and employer reputation. Intangible resources are significantly more difficult to imitate than technology or financial capital and thus constitute a more sustainable foundation for a firm's success (Barney, 1991).

The paradigm of humanistic human resource management, drawing on the achievements of work psychology, organizational sociology, and studies on values in business, provides the theoretical framework for this paper. An in-depth analysis of the impact of art on employees allows art to be understood not merely as an alternative form of capital investment, but as a component of employer branding strategy and human capital development. In this context, investment in artworks (art banking) may be conceived as a deliberate and strategically designed element of the work environment, influencing organizational relationships, employee motivation, and development. Through art, organizations can enhance value creation capabilities and improve performance outcomes; consequently, art is increasingly employed as a tool for employee development and organizational infrastructure enhancement. Art stimulates creativity, fosters new ways of thinking, and supports the development of imagination and problem-solving abilities (Schiuma, 2011). Contemporary organizations also utilize art as a source of inspiration for innovation and new management models (Carlucci, Schiuma, 2018). The main research question is as follows: does the integration of art into organizational space influence the experience of work, employer branding, and human capital.

2. Literature Review

The experience of art in the workplace is closely linked to the aesthetic dimension of organizational life, which encompasses sensory experiences, images, and symbols shaping the perception of work (Strati, 2019). As noted by B. Fryzel and A. Marcinkowski, art enables a deeper understanding of organizations and allows their internal dynamics to be interpreted in new and unexpected ways, thereby shaping organizational culture and employee experience (Fryzel, Marcinkowski, 2024). The concept of introducing art into the workplace frames it simultaneously as an aesthetic and financial asset requiring professional management.

The deliberate and systematic use of art in financial institutions and enterprises is closely associated with the creation of corporate art collections and the concept of art banking.

In its narrow sense, art banking refers to a financial service consisting of investment advisory in artworks as an alternative asset class (Baumol, 1986, pp. 10-12). From an institutional perspective, art banking is understood as a segment of banking and financial services that integrates private banking with art advisory and cultural patronage (Velthuis, 2014, p. 58). It should therefore be treated as a private banking service encompassing, among others, investment advisory, collection strategy development, valuation, auction representation, negotiation, acquisition financing, insurance, and collection management[1].

For the purposes of this article, an expanded – organizational - definition is adopted. In this view, art banking is treated as an investment practice of economic entities (art investment), primarily enterprises, consisting in the acquisition and management of artworks for the purposes of asset diversification, wealth accumulation, and the implementation of organizational image strategies. This perspective allows the analysis to extend beyond the banking sector and include activities undertaken by other economic actors (Putnam, 2009; McAndrew, 2016; Gerlis, 2014). Art banking thus constitutes a form of intermediation between the world of finance and the world of art, enabling the transformation of economic capital into symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 75). It also serves as a tool for building organizational value by supporting reputation, employer branding, and the development of human capital through engagement with art and high culture (Schiuma, 2011, p. 102).

This perspective is grounded in the assumption that art is not neutral; every artwork carries a specific axiological message, expressing values, judgments, attitudes, and preferences of its creator. One of the most intriguing aspects of art banking is the subtle - often subconscious - shaping of employees' aesthetic perception, understood as the experience of art in the workplace. A. Berleant (1991) conceptualizes aesthetic experience as an active, embodied relationship between an individual and their environment, in which perception, emotion, and action are intertwined within a participatory process. In the context of work, this implies the possibility of aesthetically experiencing organizational space or engaging with art within the work environment. A. Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in turn, describes engagement with art as an experience leading to a state of deep involvement, where perception, emotion, and concentration combine to produce an intense sense of meaning and satisfaction—an effect that, in the workplace, may foster employee creativity and reflection.

In light of the above, alternative investments such as the acquisition of artworks play a fundamental role in human capital management and constitute an element of gaining competitive advantage. Human capital may be defined narrowly - as the sum of employees competencies and knowledge - or more broadly, within a relational and social framework.

[1] An interpretation consistent with the market definition, according to which art banking refers to comprehensive services for art market clients, including the purchase, sale, appraisal, storage, and insurance of works of art (McAndrew, 2010, p. 25).

In this article, it is understood as a dynamic set of individual characteristics influencing the ability to perform assigned tasks: "it encompasses a set of human talents and predispositions, features of social personality, visions of life and professional career, beliefs and opinions, professional knowledge, the ability to apply knowledge to solve tasks and problems, algorithms of creative action, and simulation capabilities" (Doktór, Konecki, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, 2003, p. 14).

A related concept is intellectual capital, treated as an intangible asset and a generator of future profits detached from a strictly financial base. Its components include brand, trademarks, organizational culture, employees' responsiveness across diverse situations, patents, ideas, administrative and IT systems, relationships with clients and suppliers, reputation, and corporate image (Sveiby, 1997, pp. 73-97). Consequently, employees' professional skills, creativity, ideas, and responsiveness to change provide a competitive advantage grounded in values that are inalienable, authentic, unique, and non - transferable.

This logic of value creation based on uniqueness is also embedded in the concept of employer branding. It is commonly understood as a set of deliberate actions aimed at building the image of a company as an ideal employer - among employees, job candidates, business partners, clients, and other key stakeholders (Kozłowska, 2012, pp. 21-27). In practice, employer branding includes, among others, the creation of an attractive work environment, internal and external communication, the development of positive employee experiences (based on engagement, loyalty, and advocacy of the organization as an attractive workplace), marketing activities aligned with the company's vision and mission, as well as analysis and measurement of outcomes. Sułkowski (2012, p. 13) treats employer branding as an element of organizational strategy involving the shaping of an organization's reputation as an employer through activities in the areas of organizational culture, communication, and human resource management.

Therefore, this concept should not be reduced to activities targeting the external labour market, as the employer brand is primarily formed within the organization through every day, lived experiences. In this context, the introduction of art into organizational space can be seen as a process that strengthens employer branding. Today, in order to attract and retain valuable employees, organizations increasingly compete through non-financial factors, and art banking may constitute one such strategic element. It aligns with a broader discourse emphasizing the subjectivity of employees as the primary and most immediate stakeholders of the organization.

The role of art in shaping employer branding is closely connected with highlighting the distinctiveness of organizational culture and intersects with the concept of art branding. This term refers to all activities related to promoting a company's brand through broadly understood art. As defined by Gałązkiewicz (2016), "art branding is the conscious use of art in marketing communication, aimed at creating unique experiences for engaged audiences and strengthening brand image through a veil of artistic values". It is a process of co-creating a brand by leveraging the cultural capital of art in order to manage corporate image and

construct its meaning. This trend manifests itself, among others, in artist-designed and artist-endorsed products, as well as in the creation of corporate art collections.

3. Methodology

The profound significance of the impact of experiencing art in the workplace on organizational culture aligns with modern management approaches. It is reflected in the notion (Strati, 2010) that art is not merely an accessory, decoration, or demonstration of prestige, but rather a carrier of identity, and that spatial design reveals more about a company than its official missions and visions. Space influences interactions: an open, artistic environment fosters collaboration, whereas a rigid and characterless one formalizes relationships. A beautiful or inspiring work environment enhances employee engagement and the perceived meaningfulness of work.

The literature on environmental psychology and workplace design emphasizes that the workspace is neither axiologically nor psychologically neutral rather, it actively impacts stress levels, motivation, and overall well-being. When appropriately configured, it yields numerous benefits, i.a. "provides a sense of security and stimulation in experiencing everyday life, connects individuals with others, religion, and culture through abstract symbols, values, and beliefs, creates a milieu that merges the past and present life experiences of individuals and human groups, sustains identity, serves as a medium for the developmental behaviors of the individual, and maintains self-esteem during developmental transitions (e.g., aging) and life changes" (Bańka, 2014, p. 165).

A corporate art collection constitutes a curated body of artworks - ranging from paintings and sculptures to multimedia installations - acquired and exhibited by a company. Entities with a higher quality of corporate governance are more extensively engaged in art-based initiatives and demonstrate a greater propensity to support the preservation of cultural heritage (Campa, Zijlmans, 2019, pp. 81-93). Over the past century, many of the world's largest corporations have amassed significant art collections that serve not merely as aesthetic enhancements of space, but as profitable investments that cultivate distinct organizational cultures, thereby differentiating them from competitors.

Financial institutions are prominent actors in art banking, a phenomenon with historical roots in the patronage of bankers and their aspiration to elevate their social status through a privileged relationship with art. In contemporary times, this role is increasingly being assumed by corporate enterprises. The genesis of modern corporate collections dates back to the 1950s, with David Rockefeller widely regarded as their founding father. According to him, from an economic standpoint, involvement in the arts can mean direct and tangible benefits.

It can provide a company with extensive publicity and advertising, a better public reputation, and an improved corporate image. It can build better customer relations, a readier acceptance of company products, and a superior appraisal of their quality. Promotion of the arts can improve employee morale and help attract qualified personnel (English, 2007). It is posited that if a collection is dominated by innovative and abstract works acquired from emerging artists, it attests to the company's modernity, its forward-looking courage, and its appreciation for employee creativity. Conversely, accumulating classical works from bygone eras underscores stability, traditionalism, and affluence. Furthermore, providing financial support to artists serves as a testament to philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

In light of the above, art banking - understood sensu stricto as corporate art collections - fulfills a profoundly important function that extends beyond mere investment. It influences the aesthetic experiences of employees (through psychological, social, and cognitive mechanisms), which translates into the development of human capital. This, in turn, enhances employer branding, ultimately leading to an increase in organizational value and generating capacity for subsequent reinvestment in art. This cyclical mechanism can be interpreted as a model of the circular impact of culture and art on organizational development.

The proposed model demonstrates that art in the workplace constitutes an investment in strategic intangible assets that enhance firm value. The transformation mechanism is grounded in human action, which may be conceptualized as a sequence: art → perception → emotions → behaviours. The model assumes that this process unfolds positively within a supportive culture of reception, where aesthetic experience does not evoke dissonance or resistance. It further presupposes that the organization has a well-defined strategy for investing in artworks, implements forms of non-financial reporting, and emphasizes employee involvement in these processes.

The developed model aligns with the humanistic approach to human resource management, which emphasizes that HR strategies should not be dominated by economic indicators alone, but rather by the individual and their lived experiences. This paradigm is closely linked to the growing expectations of employees toward employers, the increasing awareness of employee subjectivity, the existential dimension of work (extending beyond purely economic considerations), and the recognition that organizational values have a tangible impact on employee well-being and engagement.

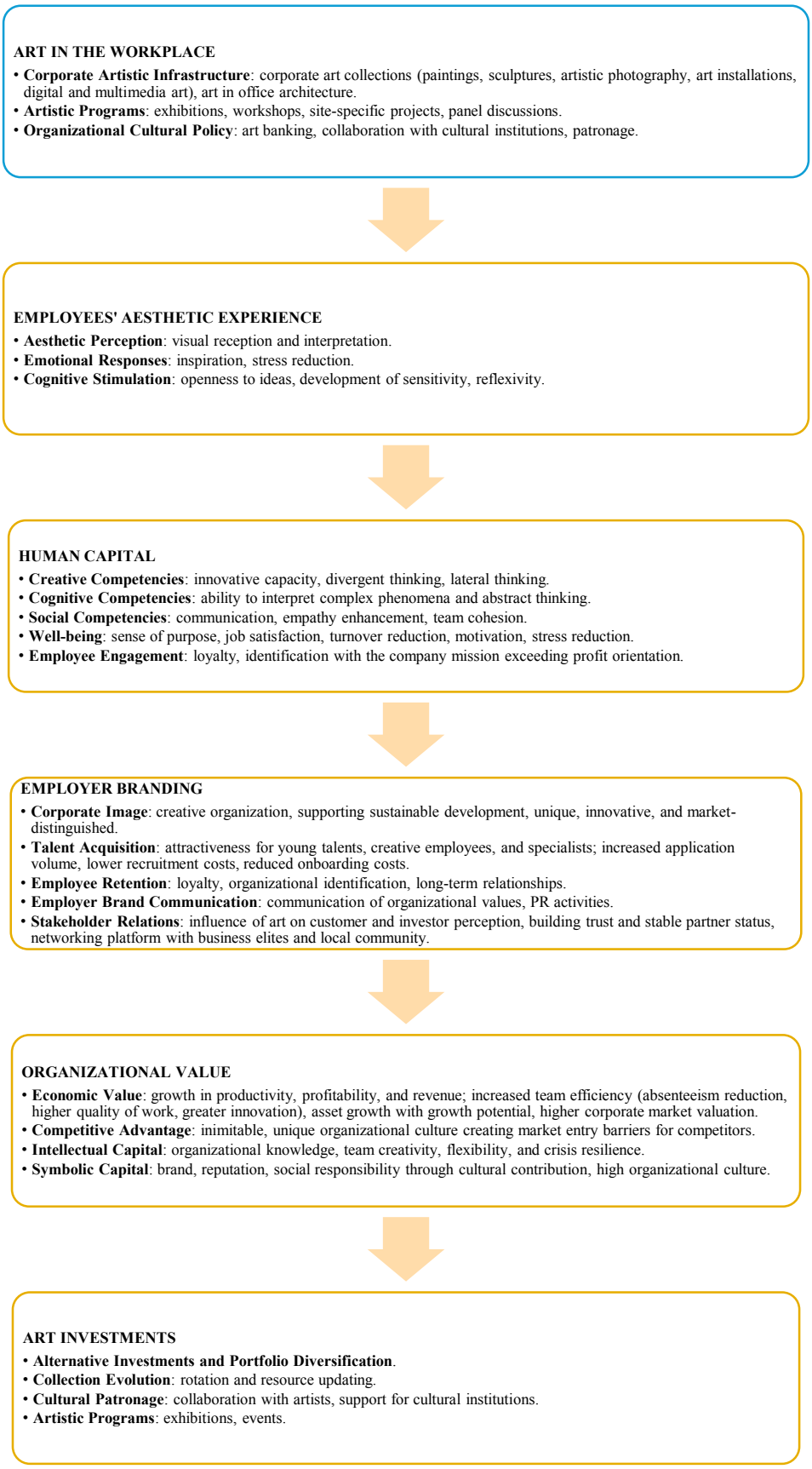

Figure 1. Model of the impact of experiencing art in the workplace on human capital, employer branding, and organizational value.

Source: Own elaboration.

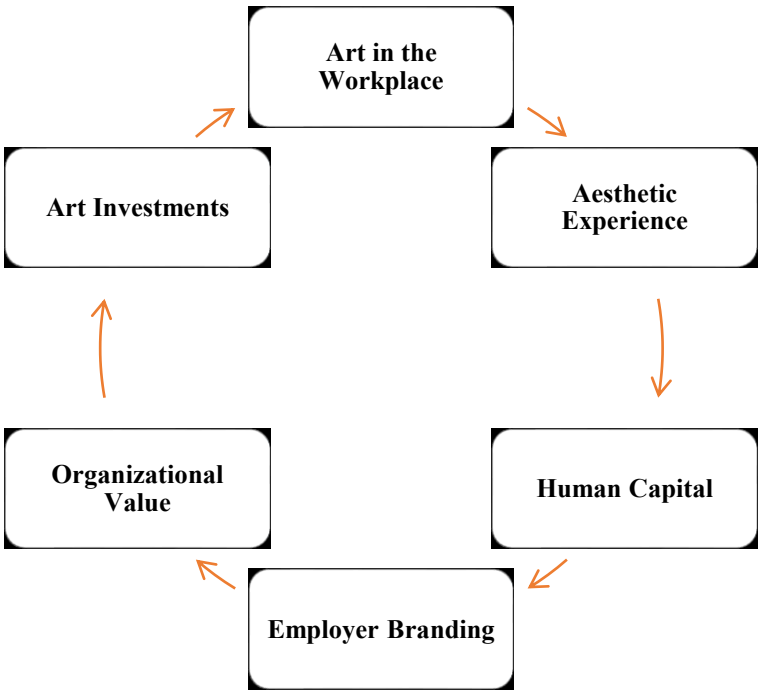

Figure 2. A model of the role of art in the workplace.

Source: Own elaboration.

A particularly insightful perspective in the literature is offered by M. Kostera, who argues that organizational management should be understood in the context of its interconnections with emotions, symbols, and metaphors. She demonstrates that organizations are not merely formal structures, but also "lived worlds," in which meaning, symbolism, and emotion play roles as significant as procedures and formal regulations (Kostera, 2023). In a turbulent environment, managers increasingly require innovative, original, and experimental tools. The incorporation of art experiences into the workplace - among others through art banking - responds to the need for higher-order values, directly influencing human capital, employer prestige, and, consequently, employer branding. Art, when integrated with business, constitutes a new "territory" of innovation within management systems (Schiuma, 2011).

To synthesize the discussion, a SWOT analysis was employed. In the case of the role of art in the workplace, strengths and opportunities appear to dominate. However, the inclusion of limitations is methodologically justified, as it prevents a one-sided interpretation of the phenomenon under study and enables the development of a credible model for managerial practice.

Table 1.
SWOT Analysis- The Role of Art in the Workplace

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Strengthening Organizational Culture • visualization of values - communicates the organization's mission and aspirations within the physical space, making them more accessible and tangible to employees, • community building - creates a platform for dialogue beyond formal organizational roles, • humanization - enables movement beyond rigid, formal frameworks by introducing authenticity and emotional engagement, • manifestation of national/local identity - signals cultural identity through investment in works by domestic artists (particularly in international branches). **2. Impact on Human Capital** • well-being - reduces stress and supports psychological well-being, particularly in high-pressure environments, • stimulation of divergent thinking - acts as a catalyst for generating non-standard solutions to complex problems, • counteracting sensory monotony - introduces moments of reflection and cognitive pause • development of soft skills - such as empathy and sensitivity. **3. Impact on Employer Branding and CSR** • coherent employer branding narrative - becomes a key differentiator in recruitment processes, • support for csr initiatives - through genuine engagement in the development of culture and the artistic environment, • communication of the non-economic dimension of work - signals that the workplace is also a space for personal development, • strengthening stakeholder relationships, • use of art collections to build organizational prestige among employees, contributing to reduced turnover. **4. Economic and Investment Value** • portfolio diversification and risk mitigation, • protection of capital against depreciation over time, • enhancement of brand value through associations with high culture and luxury, • cost optimization in spatial design - artworks may appreciate in value and are not subject to depreciation.	**1. Cultural and Communication Constraints** • cognitive dissonance and alienation – the risk that art may be misunderstood, generating strong emotions and distancing rather than integration, • perception of misaligned priorities - investments in art may be viewed as elitist or decorative, particularly when contrasted with salaries or employee benefits, potentially lowering morale, • brand inconsistency - risk of selecting artworks that conflict with organizational values, • weak feedback systems - lack of mechanisms enabling employees to express opinions. **2. Economic and Managerial Constraints** • budget limitations - high entry and maintenance costs of art collections, • lack of professional curation and decision-maker subjectivity - e.g., decisions driven by personal taste of executives, • infrastructure limitations - constraints related to physical space, • insufficient managerial competencies - difficulties in parameterization and lack of established methodologies for measuring return on art investments, complicating expenditure justification.

Cont. table 1.

Opportunities	Threats
1. Development of External Relationships • use of art collections as relational platforms for clients, business partners, and local communities, • resilience to reputational crises - building "trust capital," for example through cultural patronage, • enhancement of market prestige - opportunities to receive recognition, e.g., as a patron of the arts. **2. Internationalization and Cross - Cultural Communication** • universality - a non-verbal tool integrating geographically dispersed teams and overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, • consistency of corporate image - development of a unified aesthetic standard, • inclusivity - showcasing works by artists from diverse, underrepresented, or minority backgrounds, • strengthening the position of a global actor within the circulation of culture and new ideas. **3. Development of New Forms of Organizational Culture Management** • adoption of contemporary management trends - including well-being strategies, regenerative spaces, and responsiveness to neurodiversity, • strengthening the image of the organization as an ethical leader.	**1. Cultural and Organizational Risk** • reputational risk – art may be perceived as an attempt to impose ideological perspectives or as a form of symbolic manipulation diverting attention from ethical or environmental issues. **2. Political and Ideological Risk** • worldview polarization – potential conflicts among stakeholders with differing beliefs, including protests by religious or social groups against specific artistic content, • regulatory instability – including tax or safety (e.g., fire protection) regulations. **3. Economic and Market Risk** • decline in collection value and reduced capital liquidity, • risk of vandalism or unforeseen events, • competitive pressure – accusations of imitating employer branding strategies.

Source: Own elaboration.

The presented SWOT analysis clearly indicates the growing role that art may play in strengthening employer branding, human capital, and asset management. These conclusions are reflected in the behaviour of global leaders, who for many years have diversified their investment portfolios by incorporating assets classified within the segment of alternative investments. In Poland, such activities remain in an early stage of development, and the integration of art with economic interests and human capital development is still relatively uncommon. An intangible benefit would be greater media visibility and enhanced public exposure. Companies could emphasize their commitment to preserving cultural values, increase the transparency of their social initiatives, and reinforce the credibility of their long-term strategic direction—factors that foster trust and contribute to a more favourable brand image and the perception of a reliable partner.

4. Conclusion

In a contemporary world increasingly dominated by algorithms and economic indicators, a humanistic interpretation of art in the workplace may constitute a significant component of employer branding strategies and human capital development. Art should be understood not only as an alternative investment but also as an active element of organizational culture and a compelling field of observation.

These considerations led to the development of an original model of experiencing art in the workplace, designed to support the formulation of investment and organizational strategies. The model illustrates the relationships between the experience of art, human capital, employer branding, and, consequently, changes in corporate value. This, in turn, enables the reconstruction of the process, as it leads to the possibility of reinvesting in art. The multidimensional consequences of introducing art into corporate spaces were presented in the SWOT analysis.

The main research question - whether incorporating art into organizational space influences the work experience, employer branding, and human capital - has been positively verified. This dissertation demonstrates that the actual potential of art becomes evident when viewed through the lens of management strategy selection. However, this approach is subject to criticism due to ethical and organizational tensions and risks. Concerns include the reduction of art to a marketing function, the loss of its autonomy, its instrumental use in subtly shaping desired employee attitudes, and inconsistencies between declared corporate values and actual practices, which may lead to disengagement and cynicism.

This study has limitations of which the author is fully aware. The methodology presented does not exhaust the spectrum of possible research approaches. Empirical studies were not included due to constraints; they are currently being developed and will be presented in subsequent publications.

The work deepens the understanding of the examined area and provides valuable insights for future research on this topic. The findings may be utilized by managers, executives, and specialists.

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