ART BASED INITIATIVES AS STRATEGIC TOOLS: THE ROLE OF ART IN BUSINESS CULTURE, INNOVATIONS, LEADERSHIP

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Art-Based Initiatives as a strategic tool: the role of art in business culture, innovation, and leadership.

Abstract

Art and business are often perceived as opposite disciplines, one being emotional, expressive, and intuitive. While the other is rational, strategic, and profit-driven. Yet they intertwine with powerful constructive collaboration that drives creativity, innovation, and cultural transformation within the modern world. This dissertation explores the evolving relationship between art and business, particularly through the strategic move of the Art-Based Initiative (ABIs). That emphasises artistic processes into corporate strategies to enhance organisational adaptability, innovation and employee engagement.

Historically, art served as a tool for communication, status, and symbolic power and still is as of today. From prehistoric cave painting to renaissance patronage (Dissanayake, 1988; Art in Context, 2021). The changes come in the mid-20th century when scholars Ellen Dissanayake and Giovanni Schiuma redefine art as fundamental human behaviour and strategic recourse (Schiuma, 2011). Today, many organisations choose to adopt art not only for aesthetics, but as a method of fostering creativity, problem solving, emotional intelligence, and collaborative work culture.

This dissertation uses qualitative approaches to analyse the role of art within organisational management and its ability to support strategic transformation. The finding will be supported by a theoretical framework and practical case studies, such as Google's creative space and Craig Knight's office environment research. This demonstrates the impact of artistic engagement on the productivity and well-being of employees.

Alternatively, this dissertation argues that integrating art into business practices offers not only symbolic and cultural capital, but also strategic value. Helps organizations evolve as living organisms and adaptable beings. It offers recommendations for implementing ABIs in varied business contexts while addressing the limitations and barriers to wider adoption.

Chapter 1: Introduction.

1.1 The paradox of Art and Business

At first glance, art and business are incompatible, two distinct fields driven by different fundamental logics. Art thrives in emotion, creativity, and self-expression. Business revolves around structure, productivity, and measurable outcomes. However, beneath that lies a complex evolving relationship that only reveals unexpected harmony but also exposes unexploited potential for innovation and transformation (Schiuma, 2011). Art isn't merely an aesthetically pleasing decoration or branding in business. It is a movement for meaning-making, vision, and resilience.

Since ancient times, their connection has often been misunderstood, unrecognised, or reduced to a marketing aesthetic. Even so, as the business world grows increasingly complex, fast-paced, and ambiguous, the ability to think differently, creatively, adaptively, and emotionally connected has never been more vital. Within this context, the value of art within business is being reconsidered.

1.2 Aim and Scope of Study

This dissertation explores how art, particularly through Art Based Initiatives (ABIs), contributes to modern business strategies by fostering innovation, organizational culture, and leadership development. It focuses on how organizations that integrate artistic approaches can respond more effectively to internal and external interruptions. Encourage engagement and cultivate a workplace environment fostering creativity.

This aim is not treating art as an ornamental aspect of the corporate environment but as a strategic recourse capable of transforming business surroundings. Using theoretical and practical insight, the dissertation investigates:

- The historical evolution of art within human society before the gradual transition into the business world.
- Definitions and forms of art that extend beyond visual aesthetics.
- Theoretical basis of ABIs and their practical application in modern organisations.
- The impact of art on workplace culture, innovation, leadership, and creativity is significant.
- Challenges businesses face when integrating art into strategic practices.

1.3 Historical evolution of art: Ritual to Strategy

Art has forever played a significant role in shaping human society, before it was seen as a luxury or commodity. Prehistoric cave painting found in Lascaux, France, proves early human use of visuals to tell stories or to record events, beliefs, and daily life (World History Encyclopedia, 2016). These artworks were not made to be aesthetic admiration but more of social, spiritual and communication functions. An idea supported by Ellen Dissanayake (2000) argues that art is a fundamental evolutionary behaviour essential for human survival.

Ancient Egyptian tomb painting, monumental of Pyramids of Giza were tool of religious symbolic and political power (Ap News Online, 2024). Rennaissance murals and classical sculptures, merchant family notable like the Medici in Florence, use art to project status, power, and culture dominance. Which is the beginning and key transition of art moving into economic influences (Art in Context, 2021).

As societies move, so does the function of art. From religious tools to branding mechanisms, from ritual to innovation. This transformation laid the ground for the integration of art into organisational life.

1.4 Definition of Art in a Business Context

The word "art" originates from the Latin ars or artem, meaning skill or technique. In business, art must be understood beyond paintings or sculptures. Art in business is a storytelling, design, performance, visual branding, and leadership is a form of creative expression (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022; Dissanayake, 2000). According to Dewey, art is not a product but a process, one that creates meaning, fosters connection, and creates experience.

Giovanni Schuima (2011) expands the idea by proposing that artistic skill can be integrated into organisational structures through Art-Based Initiatives. ABIs aims to develop creative competencies and emotional intelligence. This perspective opens space to integrate art into work culture, leadership, and communication. As a method for achieving strategic business goals.

1.5 Why businesses need art Today

Today, business is moving at a rapid pace marked by digital disruption, social transformation, and market volatility. Traditional hierarchical structures often do not respond to those challenges effectively. The organisation needs more dynamic, innovative, intuitive, imaginative, flexible, and resilient (Hamel, 2007; Kim and Mauborgne, 2005). This shift demands that management systems recognise the

human-centred nature of organisations to foster engagement, creativity, and adaptability (Hamel, 2007).

As Men (2021) notes, communication breakdowns, rigid culture, and siloed thoughts lead to employee disengagement and missed opportunities for innovation. Organisations need creativity, not just product development, but in a variety of areas of work. Art provides useful tools to navigate ambiguity, cultivate empathy, and view the world from another perspective. Artistic approaches offer space for experimentation, success, failure, and learning possibilities. A key component of a successful innovation process. Schiuma (2011) Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) use artistic processes such as storytelling, visual thinking, and performance to foster innovation, strengthen collaboration, and reshape workplace culture.

Practical evidence shows that art also affects performance. Knight's study at the University of Exeter found that employees in enriched environments, including art in the workspace, were 25-32% more productive than those in sterile environments (University of Oxford, 2019). Similarly, Google actively integrates art into their workspace to boost creativity and emotional well-being (Schwartz, 2017; Stewart, 2016).

1.6 Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs)

ABIs are intervention structures that embedded artistic processes like visual art, storytelling, theatre, music, and improvision into organizational development and strategy (Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Schiuma, 2011). Unlike corporate art collections or decorative aesthetics, ABIs focused on the active engagement of employees in artistic experience that creativity, reflection, emotional intelligence, and collaboration.

The purpose of ABI is to implant creativity into the core of business and not just something "nice to have," but a practical and powerful tool to support learning, communications, and innovation. Art allows people to think differently, view things from different perspectives, step outside the box and reflect deeper, which creates more meaningful thoughts. Through this, employees can make sense of changes, explore problems creatively, and form stronger emotional and social connections at work (Barry & Meisiek, 2010).

Giovanni Schiuma (2011) states that ABIs work by influencing the tangible and intangible aspects of an organisation, shaping culture, behaviour, and energy. These practices cannot be done in isolated environments; they encourage people to express themselves openly, share stories, and take creative risks without fear of falling. These processes also serve to build adaptive ability, an essential element for business in the modern day.

These ideas connect with Ellen Dissanayake's (2000) concept of "making special", where humans naturally ritualise and enhance certain actions to give meaning. ABIs follow the same rules, using artistic forms to help employees feel more connected to their work and people. ABIs offer more than creativity; they provide businesses with a human-centred approach that supports changes, builds resilience, and cultivates environments where people can grow, connect, learn, and create meaning together.

1.7 Research Questions

To explore this complex relationship, this dissertation poses the following core questions:

1. How can art practices contribute to organisational innovation and adaptability?

2. The role of art in shaping workplace culture, communication, and emotional engagement?

3. How and why did the organisation implement Art-Based Initiatives, and what are the outcomes?

4. What are the barriers and limitations in integrating art into a traditional business model?

1.8 Structure of the Dissertation

- **Chapter 1- Introduction**

  The foundation of this study outlines the background, aims, goals, and research questions. It highlights the reasons for exploring the role of art in business, introducing key theories, and explains the relevance of the topic in modern organizational contexts.

- **Chapter 2 – Literature review**

  Reviews historical perspectives on art and its evolving function in society and business. Examines how art has transformed from ritual to strategy and defines its application in modern organisations. Including Theoretical farmwork such as Ellen Dissanayake's "making special" and Giovanni Schiuma's core principle "Art Based Initiatives."

- **Chapter 3 – Research questions**

  Presenting the main research questions that guide this study, developed from the literature review and aimed to investigate or explore how art and Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) influence business settings. This section explains the purpose behind each question and how it relates to the key themes of innovation, organisational culture, leadership, and challenges of integrating artistic practices as a strategy in traditional business models.

- **Chapter 4 – Methodology**

  Describes the research design and rationales, detailing the qualitative approach to use for data collection and analysis. Considers ethical conditions and the limitations of the study.

- **Chapter 5 – Finding**

  Present the results of primary and secondary findings, structured around key themes like creativity, emotional engagement, and practical insights on how ABI is perceived and implemented in organisational settings.

- **Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusion**

  Clarifying findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, evaluating the contributions of art in innovation, shaping leadership, collaboration, and organisational development. Finally, Summaries key insights,

reflect research limitations and practical applications of ABIs in diverse business environments.

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<h2 style="text-align:center"><u>Chapter 2: Literature Review</u></h2>

2.1 Literature Review Introduction

This chapter explores the evolving relationship between art and business, focusing on how art-based approaches like Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) contribute to modern organisational life. Beginning by tracking the historical journey of art, from ritual and symbolic to a strategic tool. Underlining how art's role has changed through time and culture. The next section defines art in a business context that goes beyond aesthetics to include storytelling, emotion, and creativity, instruments for engagement and

leadership. ABI theory is then introduced with critical ideas to look at how art shapes workplace culture, supports collaboration, and boosts wellbeing. This chapter also investigates how art acts as a catalyst for innovation and long-term strategic thinking. Together, these themes form the foundation for understanding how organisations experience, adopt, or resist creative transformation in real-life settings.

This review also highlighted where gaps exist in the literature, particularly in applying Art-Based initiatives within non-creative industries. These insights provide the basis to explore how ABI is experienced in a corporate setting, which this dissertation will investigate.

2.2 The evolution of Art

The role of art in human society has continuously evolved, adapting to cultural, political, and economic movements. Understanding this historical progress is important for exploring art's function in modern business contexts. This section overview critically examines art's transformation from human behavior to a symbolic tool eventually to a strategic business resource.

In prehistoric times, art functioned as a practical and symbolic tool. Early humans used cave paintings, carvings, and sculptures to express their beliefs, tell stories, and deliver survival knowledge (World History Encyclopedia, 2016). The Lascaux caves in France, about 15,000 years ago, depicted animal paintings to be ritualistic or communication functions (Ap News Online, 2024). Similarly to Venus is represented as a fertility icon. This suggested that art was not created for beauty, but served to deliver messages like social, spiritual, or reproductive purposes.

Ellen Dissanayake (2000) views this behaviour as "biologically rooted". Her concept of "making special" explains that humans tend to ritualise and symbolically enhance everyday life actions or events. These behaviours, like dancing, telling stories, or decorating bodies, are to strengthen social bonds and reinforce group cohesion. For Dissanayake, art was essential for survival, not merely entertainment. Her evolution of aesthetics theory reframes art as a deep-seated cognitive and emotional need to shape human interaction today (Dissanayake, 2000).

As civilisations developed, so did the function of art. In ancient Egypt, art was used in politics and religion through hieroglyphics, tomb painting, and monumental architecture like pyramids (Ap News Online, 2024). It was a strategic movement, conveying messages of power and their beliefs in the afterlife. Similarly, in Renaissance times, art played a vital role in economics and cultural life. Powerful families like the Medici used art to project power, wealth, status, and influence. A turning point in transforming artistic

patronage into a form of branding (Art in Context, 2021). This was a significant shift in art to evolve from ritual to symbolic of elite identity and political positioning.

In the mid-20th century, art function challenged and expanded into newer ideas. Artists like Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Kosuth began to use conceptual forms like ordinary objects, language, and performance to challenge traditional aesthetics. This shift expands the definition of art to include meaning-making, provocation, and social engagement (AP News Online, 2024). More importantly, this century also marked the new beginning of art in integration into education, therapy, and eventually business.

Technology advances, particularly in digital tools, have diversified artistic expression. Through digital painting, 3D modelling, animation, and other interactive media. Art becomes more accessible and embedded in branding, design, and marketing strategies (Schiuma, 2011). Businesses soon realise that artistic practice can also be used to support communication, innovation, and emotional engagement.

While Dissanayake focuses on art's evolutionary and biological roots, Giovanni Schuima (2011) switches attention towards art's strategic value in business. His work builds on Dissanayake's foundation by reframing art as a tool for organisational transformation. Through the Art-Based Initiative (ABI), he argues that art can offer unique value by influencing organisational culture, developing leadership, and driving innovation. Schuima also reframes and views business as a living organism that requires creativity, adaptability, and emotional resonance to stay competitive.

In modern business, the evolution of art reflects a bigger shift toward human-centred and emotionally intelligent models of leadership and work. Traditional structures emphasise control and efficiency, but art-based approaches offer flexibility, self-reflection, continuous learning, and symbolic communication. The historical journey of art from ritual to status, to strategy shows the persistent ability to develop alongside human needs. Today, art not only stands as a cultural asset but as a practical tool in helping organisations navigate complexity, foster innovation, and build meaningful connections.

2.3 Defining Art in Business Context

Art has no fixed definition. Across different eras, cultures, and academic disciplines, the meaning of this has constantly shifted, adapted, and expanded. In exploring how art can be applied in business environments, it is necessary to understand the broad conceptual framework of what art is and how it is perceived beyond traditional aesthetic boundaries.

The term "art" originates from the Latin ars or artem, meaning skill, craft, or technique. Historically, this referred to any activity that requires mastery and refinement. From sculpture and painting to cooking, dancing, or carpentry (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). In this view, art is not simply about creating objects, but the process of creation. One that combines intuition, knowledge, and intentionality.

Philosopher John Dewey (1934) emphasises his view on art as experience and not as a product. For Dewey, art is a communicative process that helps humans to derive meaning from emotions, actions, and relationships. Rather than defining art as a medium or outcome, he sees it as a way of understanding and engaging with the world. This idea is essential for a modern organisational context where interpretation, emotion, and creativity often influence how a team communicates and solves problems.

Ellen Dissanayake (1988, 2000) builds on this view in her "making special" concept. Arguing that art emerges as human evolutionary behaviour, not for beauty's sake, but to ritualise and emotionally promote significant activities. Singing, telling stories, and decorating spaces were not pastimes, but strategic for memory, social bonding, and meaning making. By making the ordinary "special." For Dissanayake, art is universal, adaptive, and rooted in biology.

While Dewey and Dissanayake focus on the internal and communal experience of art, Gillian Rose (2016) gives another interesting insight into the contemporary framework for understanding how visual materials run in social and organisational contexts. She states that images are never neutral. They have meaning, communication power, and influence on how people perceive themselves from others. Rose's theory of visual interpretation explains why organisations invest in symbols, branding and environments that carry artistic value. Not just for beauty, but strategic identity building. Rose's viewpoint, meaning from a cultural studies lens, complements Dissanayake's biological view by connecting aesthetics to organisational identity. Her analysis connects to business communication where visuals, logos, colour themes, and concepts carry messages on their culture, values, and purpose. However, both offer theoretical insight rather than applied studies.

Another, Richard Florida (2002), connects art and creative skills to economic innovation. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, he argues that creative professionals like artists, designers and more are essential to the 21st-century economy. For him, creativity is not a luxury but a tool for progress and development. This positioning creative broadens how we understand art in business. In this view, art is part of organisational knowledge and ability.

In the business context, art has multiple definitions; it is not just a product or performance, but a set of cognitive and emotional tools. Skills, techniques, and practices that support communication, identity, and expression. Valuing art as both a

practice process and a meaningful experience allows organisations to recognise art value beyond the aesthetic. Though most of these frames' work is theoretical and lacks large-scale empirical studies.

2.4 Art-Based Initiative (ABIs): Theoretical Foundation and Applications

While most organisations may incorporate artistic elements like logos, branded visuals, concepts, or music, these do not fully capture the deeper potential of art within the organisation's practices. Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) represent a more strategic use of art. ABI does not treat art as decoration or branding. ABI embedded artistic process into business systems to enhance innovation, leadership, and adaptability.

Giovanni Schuima (2011) defines ABIs as international applications of artistic practices, such as storytelling, theatre, music, environment, or visual art within an organisation to foster creativity, collaboration, and innovation. These initiatives are not intended to transform the workplace into galleries but to engage people emotionally and cognitively through participatory practices. ABI views art as a form of knowledge creation, a process that helps employees reflect, connect, and build meaning.

According to Barry and Meisiek (2010), ABIs work by creating interactive space and would not work in isolated environments. Barry and Meisiek (2010) argue that ABIs allow employees to experience new ways of thinking, behaving, and approaching problem solving creatively. Artistic activities welcome risk-taking, ambiguity, and experimentation, mirroring the qualities required in modern innovation. Through this image, employees can break from routine and enter a learning space, allowing creativity to appear. ABI will become a tool not only for aesthetics but for culture transformation and personal development.

Schuima expands the concept of business as a living organism; a dynamic system requires energy, adaptability, and emotional intelligence to grow. In which art is less visible but important parts to support these organisational dynamics by strengthening identity, communication, and trust. Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) encourage this by using creative activities to bring out people's potential, build stronger connections among employees, and create a new path of thinking.

An excellent example of ABI practice is the research by Dr. Craig Knight at the University of Exeter, who studied the psychology of work environments for over twelve years. In the experiment, participants worked for an hour in four different office environments. However, Knight's study used an experimental design to measure how different office environments affected productivity and well-being. Unlike Schuima's theoretical model, Knight's study provides quantifiable evidence of ABIs' outcomes.

- Lean: has only the necessary items.
- Enriched: features pre-arranged art and plants.
- Empowered: with the same art and plant but allowing participants to choose their placement.
- Disempowered: participants arranged the space themselves, but their input was undone by the researchers.

As a result, participants in enriched offices performed tasks 25% faster and reported higher well-being compared to lean offices. Participants in empowered offices perform 50% better, emphasising that personal interaction with artistic environments increases productivity and engagement. Opposite in disempowered offices, frustration, and performance no better than a lean group (University of Oxford, 2019). Knight concluded that the more people could see themselves in the workplace environment, the more connected and productive they become.

ABI practices application span in multiple domains from leadership development workshops using theatre and storytelling, to building team exercises involving collaborative activities, improvisation, or musical dialogue. These approaches were increasingly adopted by organizations that do not only seek innovation, but authenticity, reflection, and emotional resonance.

ABI offers a powerful tool for embedding creativity and emotional intelligence into everyday business practices. As a human-centred and strategic tool, it allows organisations to think creatively, fostering meaning making, empathy, and reflection (Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Schiuma, 2011)."

2.5 Art Role in Organisational Culture and Leadership

Organisational culture covers how people feel, interact, and behave, shaped by shared values, leadership style, and the emotional environment that influences how individuals perform (Schein, 2010). Art is often viewed as a secondary strategy, through visual design, symbolic gestures, storytelling, and collective experience, in shaping the culture. Art builds emotional engagement, identity, and connection in ways that typical business processes cannot.

Artistic traits in the workplace can do more than just decoration. They influence how people interpret their surroundings and how emotionally invested they feel. Ellen Dissanayake (2000) describes this natural human behaviour as "making special". People use creativity to give a certain meaning to their environment. In organisational life, this can happen through workplace designs, storytelling, shared visuals, ritual, and even how the tasks are framed. These elements are not merely aesthetically pleasing; they encourage a sense of belonging, attentiveness, and emotional commitment.

On the other hand, Giovanni Schuima (2011) suggested that culture is not only built by what is being done in business, but how it is experienced. Through Art Based Initiatives (ABIs) such as collaborative murals, storytelling sessions, or workshops to activate the experiential layer. These processes help to shape organizational energy, invisible yes, but a powerful force that drives motivation, resilience, and creativity.

Bruch et al. (2003) expand organisational energy as an emotional and psychological force behind people's ability to act, adapt, and perform in the workplace. According to Bruch, H. and Ghoshal, S. (2003), research high energy cultures where employees feel engaged, inspired, and connected perform better than low-energy cultures. Art contributes to organisational energy by enabling employees to express, create meaning, form interpersonal connections, and experience emotional resonance.

Though Schiuma (2011) and Bruch et al. (2003) view art and emotional energy as strategic assets, some scholars (e.g., Jones & Wooten, 2007) argue that such elements are difficult to measure, and it is undervalued in business decision making. This tension suggests gaps between cultural understanding and practical implementation.

Google's creative workspace is a real-world example of this theory. The workspace was designed to spark ideas, imagination, and emotional comfort. Through playful colours, designs, themed rooms, and cultural artwork. The environment allows a sense of openness, flexibility, and innovation (Schwartz, 2017). The aesthetic choices were not randomly chosen but were strategically planned to align physical space with organisational values and mindset.

Art offers a universal language, one that encourages people regardless of role, background, or language. Art plays a role in building collaborative cultures. Through practices like visual mapping or using metaphors, it can help teams talk more openly, share emotions honestly, and create more creative group thinking. This emotional communication can reduce the hierarchy of business structure and strengthen identity to support change.

According to Forbes articles (2022), a survey was carried out over 800 participants across 32 U.S. organisations found that 78% of employees agreed that adding artwork reduces stress, and 64% felt more creative. Additionally, research shows that employees experience more social interaction. These findings suggested that artistic elements can boost engagement, creativity, job satisfaction, and innovation (Stewart, 2016).

In summary, art plays a key role in shaping organisational culture by activating emotion, creating meaning, and supporting collective identity. Through ABIs and broader artistic engagement, organizations can nurture high energy, human centered environments that encourage collaboration, emotional wellbeing, and adaptability. Rather than decoration,

art is a strategic tool that shapes not only what we see, but how we work, feel, and belong.

2.6 Challenges and Barriers to Integrating Art in Business

The value of art in business is widely acknowledged; however, many organisations still struggle to fully integrate artistic methods into their strategies. The barriers are not only practical but also cultural, psychological, and structural. This reflects the deep-rooted assumptions of what is considered valid or useful in the corporate setting.

One of the main challenges is the belief that art is not essential. In many organisations, artistic practices are viewed as an aesthetic or symbolic add-on rather than a tool for learning or transformation. Giovanni Schiuma (2011) points out that businesses often struggle to see art as a form of strategic capital. The nature of art's emotional, sensory, and symbolic can be seen as too abstract or subjective for a performance-driven environment that values data, efficiency, and control. This mindset makes it difficult for a creative approach to gain attention. Particularly in logic and standardisation, industries are dominant in decision-making.

Another key barrier is a lack of awareness and understanding. Many business leaders are unfamiliar with the purpose and application of ABIs. Storytelling workshops, visual dialogue, or theatre-based training. Without a clear framework and proper introduction, these methods can be seen as unconventional or even trivial. Barry and Meisiek (2010) stress that ABIs require reflective space and a strong facilitative structure for the strategy to work. Without these conditions and proper support, organisations might treat creative activities just as a trend or team-building exercise. Rather than understanding ABI's deeper purpose and leads to the use of art in shallow ways.

Cultural norms in the organisation can also inhibit the adoption of art, particularly in the workplace with hierarchies or a conservative mindset. Daniel and Daniel (2014) underline that many organisations resist art-based approaches not because of budget or planning, but due to the fear of emotional openness and disruption to professional norms. Employees may feel judged and seen as unprofessional in corporate cultures that reject experimentation. This aligns with the concept of psychological safety, where a lack of interpersonal trust discourages creative expression and risk-taking (Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017).

Another major challenge is the difficulty of measuring impact. Artistic intervention often produces intangible outcomes, such as emotional engagement, improved morale, or symbolic alignment. These are difficult to measure or track using traditional business metrics. Bruch and Ghoshal (2003) argue that emotional intellectual energy is key to driving performance, but many leaders prefer quantifiable measures. This shows that

creativity or emotions are often ignored because they are harder to measure using traditional metrics. Making it harder for artistic practices to be accepted.

Undeniably, leadership also plays a leading role in overcoming these barriers. ABIs depend on visible support from management, particularly when leaders do not model creative thinking or engage with artistic initiatives. This can make those activities feel unimportant or disconnected from what the business values. However, when leaders get involved, it signals that creativity, empathy, and innovation are valued. Without this support, ABIs risk being viewed as side projects instead of strategies (Burnard and Hennessy, 2006).

Finally, time constraints, limited budgets, or lack of trained facilitators can be practical issues to think about. Some companies that support creativity find it hard to fit these approaches into their busy schedule or fast-moving work environments. Despite these challenges, few studies have explored how these barriers are negotiated in daily workplace settings. Most research focuses on the strategic value of art rather than its emotional or cultural resistance. This study helps to fill that gap by focusing on how supervisors and employees perceive ABI in practice.

Integrating art into business can be complex and multi-layered. The challenges come from the company's overall habits, cultural attitudes, fears of being judged, being emotional at the workplace, or the difficulty of measuring the outcomes. These barriers and challenges are not fixed, but as corporations are starting to focus more on people and emotional intelligence. There is a chance to see art not as a luxury, but a real tool to support change, connection, and resilience

2.7 Art as a Strategic Catalyst for Innovation

In the fast-moving business world marked by complexity and volatility, innovation is not an option; it is a necessity. Organisations must be able to adapt quickly, respond creatively to change, and find innovative approaches to the problem. While many rely on technology or rigid strategies, much research shows that art can act as a powerful driver of innovation and long-term thinking.

Art plays a unique role in influencing and shifting how people think. Unlike technical tools that only focus on efficiency, art invites exploration, allowing experiments. Through visual thinking, metaphors, and improvisation, employees can approach problems from new perspectives. According to Giovanni Schiuma (2011), art unlocks creative thinking and supports innovation. He explains further that art helps people to step outside routine thinking, especially when using Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) like storytelling, visual design, and performance. These experiences help people learn to reflect,

collaborate with others, and generate innovative ideas. An essential element of what is needed in today's complex business world.

Dissanayake (2000) supports this idea by explaining that humans have ways of using art to make sense of life. Dissanayake's "making special" theory emphasises that humans naturally use creative actions like rituals, decoration, or storytelling to give meaning and build emotional connection. When these tools are used in the business setting, they help teams feel more united and motivated. It also provides employees with a stronger sense of purpose, which encourages them to take creative risks and contributes to the bigger picture of success.

Richard Florida (2002) highlights that creativity and innovation are essential for success. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, he illustrated that the most successful economies and companies are ones that make space for creativity. Figures such as artists, designers, and other creatives are key drivers of progress to success. Although his theory may overlook structural inequalities and other forms of labour that contribute to innovation (Pratt, 2021).

Art also supports long-term thinking in a way that helps people imagine the future in new ways. In many companies, it is easy to focus on the short-term results, but art helps to extend that picture. Storytelling, visual mapping, or creative workshops allow a chance to change and connect emotionally with long-term goals. That results in stronger commitment and for businesses to prepare for future challenges.

Art also helps build trust and openness within teams. Creative activities create a safe space where people can express themselves freely, make mistakes, explore possibilities, and collaborate without judgment. Barry and Meisiek (2010) explain that these emotional and symbolic experiences can lead to meaningful conversations and help teams work better together.

Though much literature supports art as an innovation driver, it is essential to acknowledge that some empirical studies test this within high-performance corporate sectors. The study looks to connect theory and practice by exploring views from those who lead or manage people in such an environment or similar.

Art supports innovation by helping people to think creatively, feel emotionally connected, and work together more effectively. When art is used in the right way, it becomes a powerful tool, not only for personal development. Likewise, it builds smarter strategies and stronger organisations. Businesses that embrace this approach can become more adaptable, more human-focused, and better prepared for future challenges.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

This dissertation explores how art can contribute to business in a way that goes beyond aesthetics, particularly through Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs). The study investigates how creativity can influence workplace culture, innovation, and leadership, and how employees experience and respond to practices in business settings. The nature of ABI is emotional, symbolic, and often context based. Hence, this study takes a qualitative approach to explore how art-based practices are used and understood by people who work in an environment that is not traditionally associated with or seen as creative and emotionally connected. To guide the investigation, the following research questions were developed:

Main Research Questions:

"How are art and Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) experienced and understood within business organisations?"

Sub questions:

1. In what way can artistic practices contribute to business organisational culture, innovation, leadership, and engagement?

2. How and why ABIs' integration as a strategic tool within an organisation is important, and what outcomes of integration?

3. What do employees recognise or engage in creative or artistic elements in their workplace?

4. What are the challenges or barriers to integrating art practices like ABIs into business organisations, and the benefits of the art practices to employees?

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Methodology Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design used to investigate how art and Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) are understood and experienced in a business setting. Particularly in an industry that is not traditionally associated with art. The goal is not just to understand what ABIs are in theory, but to investigate how they are perceived and applied in the real-life workplace. To explore this, the study takes a qualitative approach, allowing

openness for personal reflection from individuals working in and not working in leadership roles.

This study seeks to understand human experiences, opinions, and interpretations rather than proving fixed hypotheses. The method is people focused and flexible more appropriately than numerical or statistical analysis. As well as adopting interpretivist perspectives, acknowledging that knowledge is shaped by people's values, language, and workplace cultures particularly around emotions, creativity and behaviors.

This chapter explains why qualitative interviews were chosen, how participants were selected, and how data were collected and analysed. Ethical considerations, research bias, and limitations are also discussed. Each decision made was to ensure that the study remains relevant to the topic, respectful to participants, and aligned to investigate how art-based approaches, like ABIs, contribute to business strategy by shaping organisational culture, encouraging innovation, leadership development, and helping employees engage more creatively and fostering creativity.

4.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

This study follows an interpretivist philosophy with a social constructivist worldview, focused on how people make meaning based on their values, emotions, and cultural experiences. Which aligns with the nature of this dissertation seeks to investigate how art and Art Based- Initiatives (ABIs) are used within organizations to influence culture, innovation, leadership, and employee engagement.

Interpretivism assumes that reality is socially constructed; knowledge is shaped by how people see the world, based on their experience, culture, and values (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This makes it the most appropriate philosophy for this study to show how employees experience art in the workplace, where views can vary depending on the role, setting, and personality. Rather than viewing one truth or general rule. Interpretivism is often subjective in nature, where findings do not lead to a single conclusion but reflect multiple viewpoints. The focus is not to measure outcomes, but to understand the individual experiences behind creativity and how people interpret in a business environment.

This also connects with social constructivism, suggesting that people create meaning through collaboration, dialogue, and cultural processes (Young & Collin, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 2021). Since ABIs involve practices such as creativity, storytelling, and experimental learning, it is sensible to adopt a philosophy that values subjective insight and narrative complexity. Shuima (2011) and Dissanayake (2000) both emphasise that the value of art lies in interpretation, symbolism, and emotion, which require a constructivist lens to understand in context.

This philosophy supports a qualitative approach, where the aim is to investigate experience and not test hypotheses but to understand how individual experience and interpret art within business setting. The focus is placed on meaning making rather than generalization. Making it appropriate for the study involves creativity, leadership, and workplace culture, central elements of ABI research.

The study also chose to select semi-structured interviews as a primary method of collection. The interviews offer flexibility while keeping the conversation focused. The semi-structured interviews align with the dissertations involving complex topics where depth and meaning are important. Allowing space for participants to express their point of view to support depth, flexibility, and reflexivity (Saunders et al., 2019; King & Brooks, 2017). While the details of the interview process are revealed in later sections, it is worth noting that this method reflects the interpretivist world view that knowledge is co-created through interpersonal interaction.

Lastly, adopting interpretivist philosophy with a social constructivist worldview allows for subjectivity and reflection. Acknowledging that emotions, creativity, and autistic practices cannot always be captured in numerical data. The values of people's voices and stories are essential when investigating how ABI is perceived and applied in business environments.

4.3 Sampling Methods

The study used purposive sampling to conduct qualitative research by selecting participants who can provide meaningful insight into the topics. The aim was not to represent a broad population but only to focus on individuals with relevant workplace experience. Particularly those who may have encountered creative practices in a professional setting, even if not formally labelled as Art Based Initiatives (ABIs).

Participants were selected based on their current role in an organisation and their ability to reflect on workplace culture, leadership, creativity, and employee engagement. The participant was an assistant accountant managing a team of five at the Ballymun Job Centre and a part-time receptionist. Participant roles provide valuable insights into team dynamics, shift coordination, emotional management, and how creative thinking is encouraged in a corporate setting. The participant held a perfect balance position of operational responsibility and people leadership, which are essential to the study grounded in an interpretivist philosophy, aiming to investigate how individuals perceive and experience art-based initiatives in workplace settings.

The sampling was small and targeted in interpretivist research in which depth and meaning are valued over quantity (Creswell, 2014). The goal was to collect a rich, detailed perspective on statistical data. This approach was supported by the flexibility of

quantitative methods, allowing room for reflection, sharing stories, and emotion, all of which are essential when investigating art and its influence in the workplace.

The research topic has touched on emotions, creativity, and cultural behavior. It was important to engage participants who felt comfortable speaking about personal experience and able to give reflective views on the business environment. Not all participants are leaders or worked on the frontline. This selection was intentional, as it allows for a contrast between those setting the tone for culture and those experiencing it day to day.

Though the sample is small, the quality of interaction and the richness of data being collected met the needs of this study. All data collection methods were intentionally made to access insider perspectives, revealing how art is experienced differently depending on job function, workplace expectations, and organisational structure. This sampling method ensures that the research remains close to real experiences, in exploring how ABIs are understood and felt within a non-artistic industry.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

To explore how art and Art Based Initiatives (ABIs) are perceived and experienced in a business environment, this study conducts semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. The chosen method aligns with the interpretivist philosophy and qualitative approach to research that values personal meaning, reflection, and social context (Bryman & Bell, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews offered flexibility to investigate complex topics such as ABIs along with creativity, leadership, and culture. This method allows participants to reflect on individual experiences. Tell stories and share personal insights on how they view ABI activities within the workplace. While giving research space to drive deeper when interesting insight emerges. Which are more suitable methods for open conversation compared to structured interviews that do not allow space for freedom in expression when discussing emotional or symbolic themes around art in business?

Each interview followed a set of questions relating to how employees engage with ABI activities, how they view workplace creativity, how important the physical surrounding environment is, and how leadership supports these processes. Participants were encouraged to share their stories, relevant examples, personal reflections, and suggestions. The interview lasted 30-45 minutes and was conducted face to face, with all sessions recorded (with consent) and transcribed for analysis before being stored safely to protect participant privacy.

Semi-structured interviews were intentionally chosen for their ability to capture depth and rich details when exploring subjective experiences. According to Saunders et al. (2019) and Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested further that qualitative interviews enable researchers to build meaning with participants, in line with interpretivist and social constructivist models. As well as obtaining nonverbal cues, emotional tones, and examples of participants may offer. These trivial details will give a richer understanding when discussing topics like workplace creativity, engagement, or culture, elements that are harder to quantify but easy to express through personal narratives.

Participants were provided with detailed information about the interviews and subjects of study through email and phone calls. Participants were given consent before taking part in the interviews. All recorded conversations are confidential; voluntary participation and data protection are fully explained to ensure ethical standards are met.

4.5 Ethical Consideration

The nature of this study is personal and reflective, meaning that ethical responsibility was a key priority throughout the project. The study involved human participants, sharing stories and personal insights into their work environment and experiences with creative practices. To ensure trust and respect, all ethical guidelines were followed in line with the National College of Ireland (NCI) ethical standard.

Individual participants received clear, detailed information outlining the study aims, processes, and rights of participants before the data was collected. Participants were informed of their freedom to participate in the study and could withdraw at any point during the process. All participants were entirely voluntary; a written informed consent was obtained before each interview, confirming the agreement to be recorded and their understanding of how their data would be used.

No real names or identifying information are used in the dissertation. Interviews, recordings, and transcripts were stored securely on password-protected devices; only the researcher had access to them. These will be deleted after a suitable retention period following NCI policy.

The interview questions involve emotional and reflective nature particularly around workplace engagement, creativity, or leadership which were carefully considered to maintain a respectful and sensitive interview environment. All questions were designed to avoid any discomfort, and participants were reminded they could skip any questions they find uncomfortable or stop the interview at any point.

As a researcher, I remain aware of personal biases as the nature of this study involves reflexivity and emotional engagement, particularly in interpreting responses to creativity

or culture. All notes were kept throughout to reflect on my influence as an interviewer and to reduce any bias possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.6 Limitations of the Study

While this research aims to explore how Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) influence and experience in business settings such as organisational culture, leadership, and innovation, there were several limitations that must be acknowledged.

First, the study was conducted using a small, qualitative sample, consisting of a limited number of participants from one large organisation. The interviews may have given rich, detailed insights; however, the findings cannot be generalised to every organisation and industry. Though the study was to focus on understanding individual experience and understanding art at work. Which seems to fit the interpretivist style, it still limits how wide the conclusion can reach.

Second, the research was conducted within a corporate setting, not traditionally associated with creative arts, where ABI practices are less familiar or developed. This means that participants might not be familiar with the ABI concept or language. It was expected that not all participants would fully understand ABI concepts and terms. Even if explanations were provided before and examples were given, some participants seemed unsure how to relate their own experience to what ABI means. Leading answers focus more on general creativity or workplace art, rather than structured ABI practices.

This, however, did not weaken the research but meant that some answers were broader. Participants may have spoken from personal feelings and everyday experience, rather than linking their stories to specific ABI structures. As a result, the data collected leans more towards understanding the overall perception of art or creativity in their work culture rather than formal initiatives.

The third limitation is the potential bias in both data collection and interpretation. Since the research involved direct interviews and was carried out face to face, participants may feel socially desirable to answer questions or give answers they thought were appropriate or safe, particularly when talking about their workplace. Which was my main concern, and instead of participating, I encouraged participants to take interviews in a relaxed and natural environment where they could express themselves freely. This kind of bias was hard to avoid, as participants may have been influenced by workplace dynamics. While efforts were made, these risks are part of human-centred research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, I also tried to reflect on my assumptions and stay open to what participants said, but my own beliefs might still have shaped the way I interpreted their stories or the interview questions.

Finally, according to the emotional and symbolic nature of ABI, some insights may remain unspoken or difficult to express. As art often works in nonverbal ways, and while participants may offer stories and experiences they have encountered, they may not fully capture the creative energy experienced in practices, as well as the understanding of the structure of ABI.

Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insight into how employees perceive and experience art in the workplace, offering a foundation for further studies to explore ABI more deeply.

Chapter 5 – Finding

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents key findings from one semi-structured interview that investigates Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) experienced and perceived in different workplace settings. The aim was to understand how individuals working in diverse roles—supervisory, assistant accountant, and receptionist make sense of creative practices and how art influences the work environment, engagement, and organisational culture. Participants included an assistant accountant who also covered front desk responsibilities and informally supported a team of five. The diverse role brought a unique insight into how art or creative elements are used in the workplace. Their reflections helped underline how ABI is understood across different levels of hierarchy and job functions.

The findings are organised into key themes that emerged from the data: the emotional value of art in the workplace, Workplace Environment & Visual Identity, Creativity, Communication, Leadership, Art-Based Approaches and ABI influence, and finally, challenges and barriers to the entrance of art elements in the workplace. Which draws a broad connection between Schiuma's (2011) view of ABI as a driver of organisational strategy and Dissanayake's (2000) theory of "making special".

Overall, this chapter offers human human-centred lens connecting real employee experience with the main ideas explored in the literature review. Particularly, how art and creativity hinder everyday work life, intentionally or not. With main focus of how individuals make sense of creativity within their role, how these relate to leadership, innovation, and culture and whether participants support or resist the ideas of Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) in business. This chapter uses key points of view from Schiuma's theory of ABI and Dissanayake's concept of "making special" as a tool for findings. All themes and insights will be equally evaluated for the full impact of art within organisational life.

5.2 Overview of Participants

The participant is a qualified accountant currently working in the social welfare sector. Operating in a team of five and holding a leadership role, overseeing key financial and administrative responsibilities. Apart from the Participant's primary accounting duties, work as a receptionist, contributing to front-line communications and daily operations on a part-time basis.

The Participant role offers a valuable perspective on how creativity, communication, and leadership manifest in organisational settings, particularly in sectors that are not traditionally associated with creativity and art-based approaches. Participant insight provides a ground understanding of how creative initiatives might influence employee engagement, workplace culture, and innovation from personal insights who manage both financial and interpersonal functions. The participant has explored five themes through interviews relevant to investigating Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) experienced in work settings.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Emotional Value of Art in the workplace

Participants expressed a strong emotional connection to art and creativity in the workplace, highlighting how creative experience can enhance individual well-being and team dynamics. The participant recalled a creative workshop held in the organisation where employees participated by choice in visual goal-setting activities. The workshop was designed to help employees reflect on their professional direction, particularly those who struggle to visualise their goals.

Participant noted that "If you put an example of visually front of people, I think it works better than having to figure it out yourselves. If you do it visually and using an object as an example, I think it works perfectly."

This aligns with Schuima's (2011) concept of Art-Based Initiatives that frame art as not just aesthetics, but a tool to encourage emotional engagement, collaboration, and meaning-making. For participants, the workshop improves employee relationships, especially team members' relationships, the mood around the building, and the environment that feels more human-centred. It allows people to be more open to one another and feel closer to supporting each other.

Participant reveals that having art or creative acknowledgement in organisational culture brings in a sense of humanity and balance in a rigid structure and routine role. Although participants do not rely on artistic methods in their daily work, they still recognise that art has an emotional impact beyond function, as it can boost moods, morale, and self-worth within the workplace. This perspective greatly resonates with Dissanayake's (2000) concept of "making special", which frames art as a universal human behaviour in adding symbolic and emotional meaning to ordinary space.

In addition, this emotional connection reflects Bruch and Ghoshal's (2003) ideas of organisational energy. Referring to the collective emotional and psychological capacity of employees to act with purpose. Suggesting that emotional engagement in the workplace is more likely to foster engagement, motivation, adaptability, and resilience to challenges. The emotional connection would likely motivate employees not only by task

but also by sharing positive emotional energy within the workplace. The emotional uplift participant described suggested that creative or artistic engagement contributes to a deeper sense of purpose and is a factor affecting organisational performance.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Visual Identity & Environment

Participants expressed strong agreement with the importance of visual surroundings in shaping emotional connection, identity, belonging, and focus within the workplace. Participant strongly believes that physical layout and aesthetics hugely influence the well-being of employees as well as their performance.

Participants note, "Some people function depending on their surroundings, I would be one of those people. If I go somewhere and it's plain or chaos or nothing organised. I would not be able to work properly. Even if you are at work, you still need the social aspect to let people express themselves. And that gives them a sense of emotional support and motivation."

As well as strongly believe that employees should have the freedom to express their interests through decorating their space, as it fosters a sense of belonging and emotional comfort. This reflects Schiuma's (2011) theory that Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) enhance emotional engagement by creating a meaningful, human-centred work environment that goes beyond functional design to support the well-being of employees. Along with minor elements like cleanliness and spatial arrangement, they can trigger informal signals of care, culture, and values within the team or organisation.

Interestingly, while participant value creativity in the workplace environment, participant admit to not typically apply creativity or visual strategies in accountant tasks but prefer a traditionally rigid systems that offer structure and consistency in accounting. Nonetheless participants acknowledge that others may rely on and benefit from visual aids or creative approaches to problem solving. This openness reflects the inclusive and adaptive nature of ABIs as a tool for engaging diverse work styles, even in functionally rigid systems.

Participant perspective also resonates with Dissanayake's (2000) concept of "making special," framing art as a fundamental human behaviour that tends to enhance and ritualise the surroundings to create meaning and emotional connection. The freedom to customise the workplace, such as beautifying the space and adding symbolic meaning, was not about superficial aesthetics, but rather creating a space that felt psychologically safe, inviting, and motivational. It is an action that turns routine work into something personal and emotionally supportive.

Participant insight also aligns closely with Craig Knight's (University of Exeter) research, which found that employees performed significantly better in personalised and enriched environments as well as experienced higher morale than those in sterile settings and in undecorated settings. As Knight's conclusions suggested that employees thrive in a space where they can see themselves reflected, participants' sense of emotional alignment with the surroundings reinforces Knight's conclusion that people often thrive more in a space where they can see themselves reflected.

Lastly, participant perspective is linked to Gillian Rose's (2016) theory of visual culture, exploring how images, spaces, and visual arrangement can convey deeper cultural and social meaning. Rose views that the visual environment is never neutral, as it communicates silent messages of power, identity, and values. For participants' case of discomfort with disorganised or sterile spaces mirrors Rose's view that it is an unspoken message to the environment, such as neglect, lack of care, or emotional disconnectedness. Conversely, a well-maintained and visually expressive setting sends a signal of attentiveness, inclusiveness, and shared identity. From this perspective, the design and aesthetic of the workplace becomes non-verbal communication that shapes how employees interpret their place within the organisation. Participants' emotional response to different visual settings emphasises how visual identity serves as a reflection of organisational culture, influencing both their feeling towards their work and their work performance.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Creativity, Communication, and Leadership

While the participant's accounting role does not typically involve creative tasks, participants shared experiences on how creativity manifests in the role, often through communication to support the team. Participants describe their main duties as structured and system-driven but acknowledge that creativity is necessary in leadership and communication. For example, participants occasionally use recording or visual presentation tools to explain to team members, particularly when verbal instructions are not effective.

Participant noted that: "Everybody perceives things differently and takes things in differently, but for me Excel spreadsheet is my bible (to help with tasks). For somebody else, it could be visual. I once recorded the entire process of doing the pay role step by step visually for a member to understand."

This portrays a form of applying creativity in communication, where participants adapt to an approach based on team learning styles and needs. It is also a key aspect of emotional intelligence, notably the ability to empathise, listen, and respond to the emotional needs of others. A fundamental leadership trait within Schuima's (2011) Art-

Based Initiatives (ABIs) theory supports emotional intelligence and adaptive communications, even if it's within a technical role. While participants believe accounting roles are not creative practitioners, the ability to adapt communication style demonstrates situational creativity.

It also aligns with Barry and Meisiek's (2010) interpretation of the ABI environment as a space that encourages experimentation and narrative. Even if the workplace does not formally implement ABIs, participants' informal use of visual aids and storytelling techniques mirrors the creative practices embedded in everyday communication. A concept that Barry and Meisiek point out is often overlooked in rigid or hierarchical structures.

Crucially, participants noted that in this adaptation of creative communication is encouraged and supported by senior leadership. According to participant management, not only approves of the methods but also actively participates in creative practices. This contrasts with Daniel and Daniel (2014) and Barry and Meisiek (2010), who argue that many leadership cultures often resist art-based approaches due to fear of emotional openness or lack of professionalism. For this case, leadership involvement reinforces the importance of creativity within the workplace and signals that innovation, flexibility, and personal expression are valued.

This positive leadership support also strengthens Bruch and Ghoshal's (2003) organisational energy. When leaders themselves engage in creative practices, they elevate the overall energy, cohesion, and morale of teams. Participant experience supports the idea that when creativity is modelled by leadership, it can spread, and foster a human centered and connected work culture. More to this, it highlights the potential of ABI in strategic leadership practices that shape organisational culture.

5.2.4 Theme 4: ABI awareness

Participants were unfamiliar with the concept of "Art-Based Initiatives (ABI)." Through the discussion, it was clear that the participants had engaged with practices that align with ABI principles. By participating in creative workshops, visual exercises, and team-based goal-setting activities that incorporate elements of drawing and visualising future outcomes. Although it was not formally labelled as "art-based", it had a clear impact on the engagement and communication of participants narrating the experience.

Participants show a positive effect on art-based or creative-based approach experience, noting that it helps team members feel more connected. As the colleagues were more willing to share their thoughts and ideas, it helped to build trust among the team and reduce tension and judgment that may occur. Participants also underline that visual goal setting, whether it is through creative sessions, drawing about the future, or mapping

tasks, has made complex ideas more accessible. By translating intangible objectives into visual or symbolic structures. It also leads the team to engage with work on a personal level and connect. This strengthens Barry and Meisiek's (2010) argument that ABI practices are often embedded into organisations without formal recognition, and their impact is felt intuitively. Through the emotional engagement, collaborative energy, and sense of meaning it generates within the teams or organisation.

Crucially, participants believe the role is not associated with art or even the practices of art in terms of ABI or traditionally. However, from the investigation, participant openness to creative tools indicates a broad understanding of how engaging with these activities can bring a positive effect to team cohesion, increasing empathy, reducing communication barriers, and improving morale. Taylor and Ladkin (2009) claim that ABI does not lie in their artistic refinement, but rather in the capacity to shift perspective, provoking emotional insight, and opening to new forms of understanding. Moreover, this reflects Shcuima's (2011) positioning of ABI as an adaptable strategic resource, not limited to only the art sector, but relevant across industry, including a structured environment like accounting.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Challenges and Barriers

While the participants expressed openness to creative practices in the workplace, there are several challenges and tensions to be addressed regarding the integration of Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) as a strategy, especially in structured or technical roles. Although participants had previously engaged with creative activities such as visual goal setting and communication workshops, participant explained that these practices were not central to accountant duties and noted, "In my work I don't think it would be a problem for integration but there are some individual I think would not be comfortable because they have a way of doing their own thing. It's hard to say if it should be introduced or a choice, but I am leaning towards it being a choice for it to be beneficial. Because it is not great if it is coming in and forcing people to do things slightly different in what they are already working on."

This reflects a main challenge in ABI adoption of the mismatch between creativity and task precision. Participants stressed that the work requires accuracy, structure, and consistency, and introducing creative strategies could be difficult in roles where there is no room for error. This echoes Schuima's (2011) alarm that ABI may face resistance in roles defined by technical correctness unless it is strategically integrated in a way to support and does not disrupt the functionality of the work.

Nonetheless, participants strongly agreed that creative practices such as visual workshops, design thinking, and team-building sessions could bring value to wider

organisations. Participant believed that the initiatives could support organization morale, emotional engagement, and collaboration, and stated that participant managers see the values and the importance of these practices and give full support. Not only did they encourage staff to take part in activities, but they also participated regularly. Even so, participants did not fully understand the concept of ABI or how it can be measured or evaluated effectively. This created uncertainty and a disconnect between recognising the potential values and knowing how to apply them in practice.

This reflects Daniel and Daniel's (2014) findings. When there is a lack of conceptual understanding, it often brings confusion and inefficient control that can prevent ABIs from being taken seriously. Commonly occurs in an environment where professionalism is paralleled with structure and rationality. Participants also express that ABIs are a good strategy in theory, but believe that it should be optional, not forced across all departments. Not all departments could adopt or adapt to the strategy, specifically in the department where there is an elevated level of precision. Suggesting that ABIs successfully introduced require flexibility or choice as an occasional activity, rather than seeing it as an integrated strategic tool.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents important discussion and conclusion of the findings related to the study's central aim to explore how art, particularly through Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs), contributes to modern business strategies by fostering innovation, organisational culture, and leadership development. Drawing from one participant's perspective and experience who works in both financial and frontline roles in social welfare organisations. The research investigates how Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) and art are perceived, experienced, and informally integrated in everyday work contexts.

The discussion clarifies the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, particularly through Schiuma (2011), Dissanayake (2000), and Barry & Meisiek's (2010) work. To evaluate the contribution of ABIs in supporting emotional engagement, shaping leadership, and communication to fostering collaboration and improving organisational culture. With special attention to how ABI operates in rigid, structured environments and how it may support innovation beyond artistic functions. Finalised this chapter by summarising key insights, addressing research limitations and reflecting on the practical application of ABI in diverse business settings.

6.2.1 Emotional and Environmental Dimensions of ABI

Participant experience emphasises that the emotional and symbolic influence of ABI in a structured organisational environment, especially in relation to employee wellbeing and workplace atmosphere. Although participant's daily tasks in accounting are system-driven, participants express a strong emotional connection to art-based experiences. From recalling a creative workshop using visual goal setting. This resonates with Schuima's (2011) view that ABIs are not limited to aesthetic enhancement but serve as a tool for emotional engagement, interpersonal connection, and meaning making in the workplace. Participant noted that visual examples to team members "figure things out" more effectively, supporting the idea that creativity enhances relational and emotional dynamics.

Supporting Bruch and Ghoshal's (2003) theory of organisational energy, which describes how emotional uplift contributes to motivation, adaptability, and shared purpose. Participant describes that even in the workplace, there is a need for a social aspect, a "human-centred" environment. This suggests that ABI has the potential to support teams beyond operational performance by enhancing mood, morale, and interpersonal cohesion. It also shows how creative communication fosters psychological safety and trust, enhancing ABI's role in building collaborative cultures.

Moreover, participants linked emotional engagement directly to visual surroundings, such as layout, personalisation, and cleanliness. Participants' strong preferences for organising an expressive environment illustrate how visual identity shapes a sense of belonging and focus on the workplace. This reflects Knight's (2010) findings that employees perform far better in an enriched space where they can see themselves reflected and supported or recognised by others. This confirms Dissanayake's (2000) concept of "making special," indicating that humans seek to personalise and ritualise their environment to create emotional meaning and connection. Even without artistic function, the ability to customise a workplace becomes a symbolic act, translating routine into something personal connection.

The discomfort or disorganised environment participant expressed alignment with Gillian Rose's (2016) theory of visual culture. Seeing space as a formal form of nonverbal communication. Participant emotional reaction suggests that visual elements display a message about care, identity, and diversity in the organisation. Affirming that ABI plays a vital role in shaping emotional experience and environmental culture. Even in roles not traditionally associated with creativity. The symbolic power of visual and artistic practices reinforces ABI's relevance to organisational development and employee engagement.

6.2.2 Leadership, Communication, and Creative Practice

Participant experience reveals that creativity was not central to accounting duties, but played a crucial role in communication, explaining processes, and leading the team. This finding reflects the adaptive and interpersonal dimensions of ABI, as outlined in Schuima's (2011) framework. While participants stated to rely heavily on structured systems like spreadsheets, participants also recognised that team members learn differently and occasionally require visual, narrative, or recording forms of instructions. This mirrors the role of emotional intelligence in leadership, the ability to empathise and tailor communication style to other needs, a trait of ABI encourages theory.

This creativity indicates Barry and Meisiek's (2010) concept of ABI environments as a space allowing narrative-building, experimentation, and knowledge sharing even in non-creative fields. Although participant organization does not formally implement ABI as strategy, participant informal use of visual aids and creative activities reflect how ABI principles are intuitively performed within the organization's dynamics.

Participants also noted that the creative approach was not only accepted but encouraged by leadership, with managers participating in visual sessions alongside employees. This contrasts with Daniel and Daniel (2014), who argue that leadership often resists ABI out of discomfort with emotional openness. Or the belief that such practices lack measurable business value. Their research suggested that traditional leadership models often prioritise control, rationality, and efficiency, leaving little space for creativity or an emotionally expressive approach like ABI. However, in this case, the creative behaviour is modelled from top down, reinforced by the idea that leadership plays a critical role in spreading ABI value across the organisation.

Although the participant was unfamiliar with the formal term Art Based Initiatives, the participant experienced supports Taylor and Ladkin's (2009) claim that ABIs' value does not lie in artistic or technical skill, but in is ability to provoke insight, encourage emotional connection, and alternative ways of seeing or understanding workplace dynamics. For example, the use of visual recording to explain tasks or involvement in goal-setting workshops, this creative interaction allowed space for reflection, empathy, and shared understanding. This is a core mechanism of ABI impact.

6.2.3 Barriers to ABI Integration in Structured Roles

Even though participants recognised the value of creative practices but raised concerns about the feasibility and appropriateness of applying Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) in precision-based roles such as accounting. Participant noted that while creativity might

benefit some individuals or teams, structured role demands consistency and accuracy, leaving a limited space for variation. This supports Schuima's (2011) concerns that Art-Based Initiatives may be rejected in such roles if interfering with how the task is usually done or demanding a mindset that does not match the job logic.

Moreover, participants reflected uncertainty on the meaning and scope of the ABI itself. Though participants were involved in creative workshops and visual tasks, participants did not associate these with the strategic concept of ABI or how ABI's success could be measured, evaluated, or sustained. This reflects the problem of conceptual ambiguity. Discussed by Daniel and Daniel (2014), where creative initiatives like ABI are not clearly defined or explained, to be adapted to the workplace or connected to the business goals, they often fail to gain support. In this case, it led ABI to be seen as an optional choice rather than a useful or necessary tool.

This leads to another raised issue of ABI feeling imposed rather than offered. Participants suggested that introducing creativity as a choice would be more effective, particularly in departments where employees have established methods and might see change as disruptive or unnecessary. Reflecting the broader issue in ABI implementation of using the same approach for everyone can push some employees away, notably if they do not see how creative methods are related to their work. Instead, ABI is likely to be more successful when positioned as optional and tailored to each team's needs.

6.3 Conclusion

This dissertation sets out to explore how Art-Based Initiatives (ABIs) can serve as strategic tools within the modern business setting, particularly in fostering innovation, emotional engagement, and leadership development. Drawing on insights from participants operating in technical and frontline roles.

The finding revealed that while ABI practices are often unrecognised, their emotional and communicative impact is deeply felt. Creative activities enhanced team cohesion, supported adaptive communication, and fostered human centered work culture. These insights align with Shuiman's strategic view of ABI and Dissanayake's theory of "making special," while underlining leadership's role in legitimising creativity. Yet challenges remain unsolved. Conceptual ambiguity, lack of measurement, and misalignment with technical tasks present significant barriers to integration.

Practically, this study suggested that ABIs hold strategic value when implemented with flexibility, voluntary engagement, and leadership support. Although limited in scope, the research offers valuable insight into how creative practices function informally across diverse work contexts. Additionally, future research could build on these findings through cross-sector comparisons to further examine ABI's long-term impact on organisational development and employee engagement.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Section A: Role and Working Style

1. Can you tell me about your role, both the accounting side and the support or leadership tasks you take on?

2. What kind of responsibilities do you manage on a daily or weekly basis?

3. Do you often find yourself helping with coordination, communication, or organising people or tasks?

Section B: Communication & Collaboration

4. In your experience, how important is good communication in your team or department?

5. Are there any techniques you use to make communication clearer or more engaging, especially across departments?

6. Have you ever used diagrams, visual aids, templates, or storytelling when explaining something complex or new?

Section C: Creativity and Problem-Solving

7. Accounting is often seen as technical, but do you think there is room for creative thinking in how problems are solved or how tasks are managed?

8. Can you share an example of a time when you or someone on your team approached a challenge more creatively or flexibly?

9. In what ways, if any, do you think creativity or flexibility helps your team perform better?

Section D: Atmosphere and Workplace Culture

10. How would you describe the atmosphere in your workplace? (e.g., formal, people-focused, open, traditional)

11. Do you think the physical space—like the office design, visuals, or shared areas—has any impact on how people feel or behave at work?

12. What do you think helps employees feel emotionally supported, motivated, or connected to their work?

Section E: Exploring ABI Themes (without using jargon)

13. Have you ever been involved in activities at work that felt different from usual tasks, like team building, workshops, training games, or creative brainstorming?
14. Even if not formally creative, do you use things like motivational quotes, diagrams, shared rituals, humour, or storytelling when leading or working with others?
15. If your company offered creative sessions (like visual workshops, problem-solving games, or design thinking), would that be something you would be open to? Why or why not?

Final Thoughts

19. How do you define creativity at work, from your perspective?

20. Do you personally believe art, creativity, or emotional expression can bring value into a business environment, even in structured roles like finance?

21. If you could make one change to improve how people work together or solve problems in your workplace, what would it be?

22. What do you think would be challenging about introducing more creative or emotional methods into a professional setting like yours?

Appendix B: Coding Framework- Thematic Table

Theme	Description	Example Codes
Theme 1: Emotional Value of Art in the Workplace	Emotional connection to creativity, well-being at work, and shared visual tools	Visual goal setting, motivation, and team closeness

Theme 2: Visual Identity & Environment	Physical surroundings as emotional cues; decoration as self-expression	Organised space, personalised desks, spatial aesthetics
Theme 3: Creativity, Communication & Leadership	Visual tools for explaining tasks, leadership support for creativity	Recorded training videos, different learning styles, and manager-led initiatives
Theme 4: ABI Awareness	Creative practices done without awareness of ABI terminology	Visual sessions, drawing goals, and creative workshops
Theme 5: Challenges & Barriers	Difficulty integrating ABI in technical roles, preference for structure	Task precision, "not for everyone," conceptual uncertainty

Appendix C: AI Acknowledgement Supplement

[Capstone Project]

[Art-Based Initiatives as Strategic tools: The role of Art in Business Culture, Innovation, Leadership.]

Your Name/Student Number	Course	Date
x22509899	Capstone Project	20/2/2025

This section is a supplement to the main assignment, to be used if AI was used in any capacity in the creation of your assignment; if you have queries about how to do this, please contact your lecturer. For an example of how to fill these sections out, please click here.

AI Acknowledgment

This section acknowledges the AI tools that were utilised in the process of completing this assignment.

Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
ChatGPT	Used to help me generate ideas and identify gaps in my research, space for information improvement in accuracy and up-to-date information. Additionally, helping me and suggesting me site to find information, along with providing academic references and suggesting language used to suit academic style and stay on point to the subject.	https://chatgpt.com
Quill Bot	Enhance and correct my vocabulary and grammar more accurately.	https://quillbot.com/paraphrasing-tool

Description of AI Usage

This section provides a more detailed description of how the AI tools were used in the assignment. It includes information about the prompts given to the AI tool, the responses received, and how these responses were utilised or modified in the assignment. One table should be used for each tool.

[Chat GPT]	
[Was struggling to make a connection while making it theoretically cohesive e and was able to read an example and learn from it before adapting the method to do on my paper.]	
How can I add a clear link between emotional intelligence and leadership within ABI theory to elevate my theme 3 and make it more theoretically cohesive?	1. State the connection between EI and leadership: You already noted that your participant uses adaptive communication. Expand this by framing it as **evidence of emotional intelligence**, a **key leadership trait**. *"The participant's ability to adapt communication methods—such as using visual tools to accommodate different learning styles—demonstrates key elements of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), such as empathy and social awareness. These competencies are essential for effective leadership, especially in emotionally diverse teams."* ◆ 2. Anchor it in ABI theory: Use **Schiuma (2011)** or **Barry & Meisiek (2010)** to show how ABIs help foster or reveal emotionally intelligent leadership behaviours. *"This aligns with Schiuma's (2011) view that ABIs promote emotionally intelligent*

leadership by creating reflective spaces where empathy, openness, and human-centred decision-making can emerge."

♦ 3. Make the connection between creative practices and leadership influence:

Leadership support for ABI signals its importance in shaping organisational **energy and cohesion** (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2003).

"By engaging with and modelling creative behaviours, leadership not only validates ABI practices but also cultivates a psychologically safe space for emotional expression and innovation. This reinforces Barry and Meisiek's (2010) interpretation of ABI environments as enablers of emotional resonance, making leadership not just functional, but emotionally connective."

♦ 4. Synthesise the point clearly:

End with a cohesive statement tying ABI, EI, and leadership together.

"In this sense, emotional intelligence becomes not just an individual leadership trait, but a strategic asset embedded in ABI practices, reinforcing creativity as a leadership tool rather than a soft extra."

☑️ Final Insert Example (into Theme 3):

	"The participant's adaptive communication style—shifting between spreadsheets and recorded visuals to match team learning preferences—demonstrates key components of emotional intelligence, particularly empathy and relationship management (Goleman, 1995). These traits are increasingly recognised as vital for contemporary leadership. ABI theory reinforces this, with Schiuma (2011) arguing that art-based practices provide environments where emotional awareness, reflection, and trust can emerge naturally. The creative spaces fostered through ABI allow leaders to model emotionally intelligent behaviour, legitimising openness and experimentation as core values within the team. Thus, creativity and communication are not only practical tools, but indicators of emotionally intelligent leadership shaped through ABI-informed culture."