

# **Kitsch in Management: Characteristic Forms, Carriers and Propagators**

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## **Abstract**

Motivation to deal with the problem of managerial kitsch was the natural consequence of our previous research about crossing the borders of art and management. Our own – both practical and theoretical – experience in the fields of art and management was the main argument for combining these areas with benefits to the science and practice of management. This approach in management literature is rare and fragmentary; we try to establish the main routes for the future research. The delicate edging and features of art lead to the phenomenon of kitsch as something opposite to art or. Applying the well-developed theory of aesthetic kitsch into management area was vital for understanding the real nature of the phenomenon of kitsch in management. The research methodology bases on a qualitative review of the literature; the methodological approach bases on interdisciplinary and multi-paradigm approach taking into account the publications from areas of art (aesthetics theories) and management (organisational kitsch). The main research questions were: 1) is there any set of factors/features constituting the management kitsch and 2) what type/types of organisational roles are main for kitsch transfer? After the broad review of the literature, a synthetic description of management kitsch forms (one best way claim, simplification, grandiosity, organisational cynicism functional stupidity, bullshit jobs, seeming management) and the main carriers and propagators of organisational kitsch (management gurus, narcissistic managers, mendacious CEOs and owners) were described and the management kitsch was defined. Management kitsch should be defined and reduced for quality improvement of organizational life.

**Key words:** kitsch in management, kitsch in aesthetics, critical management studies

## **Introduction: Taste and Disgust, Aesthetic Theory of Organization**

It is not an easy task to define the concept of kitsch. We may find many definitions of it, but each one leaves us with the feeling of insufficiency. Kitsch is easier to feel than to describe. By transferring the theory of kitsch from the field of aesthetics to the field of management, depending on the definition of kitsch, we get a kind of scale which we may put an aesthetic assessment of the manager's activity on: from the artist/virtuoso management to kitsch-method-producer imitating management (Szostak and Sułkowski, 2020). Since each assessment is the basis of improvement, the field of Critical Management Studies (CMS) opens itself as a theoretical canvas for the collision of aesthetics with management.

A positive change – as the basis of the CMS – is the purpose of constructive criticism: diagnosis, leading to therapy. This approach involves the use of humanistic management methods, within which

nine pragmatic and methodological objectives (characteristic of the CMS cultural trend) can be distinguished (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003): 1) creating organizational cultures based on real intra-organizational democracy; 2) removing all forms of violence from the organizational culture by: rejecting false consciousness, reflectiveness, creating meaning (managing sense making), humanization and moral and ethical sensitivity; 3) improving the social position of disadvantaged groups through the use of emancipation methods such as: empowerment, parities, political correctness; 4) implementing an emancipatory culture both at the level of relationships between organizations, within the organization and between employees; 5) rejection of the functionalist paradigm and instrumental reason in cultural interpretations; 6) developing qualitative, interpretative and engaged methods of researching organizational cultures; 7) the transformation of professionalism and technocratism of the academic community and management practitioners into critical methodological pluralism; 8) creating a reflective and critical organizational culture that will guide the development of organizations, society and people towards an increase in humanization; 9) developing humanistic management projects by radicalizing methods. Referring critically – in the spirit of the theory of art – to some of the above-mentioned CMS goals, one could say that they are unreal, or in themselves they are closer to kitsch than the immanent values of real artistic activity. The basic argument on the ground of aesthetics is that democratization – by its statistical nature – means lowering the bar to a level accepted by the majority, and this isn't associated with high quality. We can even find some of these goals to move towards kitsch methodically. Nevertheless, CMS is vital approach in our study.

The second half of the 20th century broadly transposed the phenomenon of kitsch scientifically from the field of art to other areas of life. Kitsch in management can be considered in two ways: literal and metaphorical. Literal reasoning is based on “bad taste” – question of a taste, i.e. the ability to recognize good from evil (Herbert, 1968; Eco, 1989); “golden recipes” of the management gurus, rhetoric of some of the guidebooks on management and leadership, shallow management concepts (like Maslow's pyramid of needs). In turn, the metaphorical understanding of kitsch is “any management”, that is: non-creative and flattering low motives, deprived of mission – senseless and pointless, founded on the cynicism of organizational managers (Selznick, 1948), present in scientific area as Bullshit Management, BSM (Sułkowski, 2019). Using aesthetic optics, we can talk also about “taste and disgust in management”: in some actions of managers we can find universal values, while in others – quite the opposite. In this theoretical framework – art-kitsch and taste-disgust – we'll be moving in this work.

## Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The research methodology was based on a qualitative review of the literature taken from databases: EBSCO, Google Scholar, JSTOR and Scopus. The methodological approach based on interdisciplinary and multi-paradigm approach taking into account the publications from areas of art (aesthetics theories) and management (organisational kitsch). The main research questions were: 1) is there any set of factors/features that constitutes the kitsch in management and 2) what type/types of organisational roles are main for kitsch transfer? An additional goal was to define the kitsch phenomenon in management.

## Literature Review

Analysis of the kitsch phenomenon in art is necessary to transpose the kitsch concept into management, that's why the literature review is divided on two groups: aesthetics and management. Both areas are firstly described separately to prepare the base for drawing the conclusions of the research.

### *Kitsch in Aesthetics*

Although the kitsch phenomenon has always existed in art, it was named only at the end of the 19th century and it is only from this period that the development of its theory dates. This development of theory went hand in hand with the practical intensification of kitsch in the art of the 19th and 20th centuries, when the emphasis was placed on satisfying mass taste through mass (cheap and fast) production (Greenberg, 1985; Calinescu, 1987); it was a way to increase the material profits of artists who – putting aside the issue of loyalty to the ideals of art – focused on producing artefacts that found crowds of recipients, and thus enabling easier earning of livelihood. Kitsch, as a consequence of commodification, expresses problems inherent to high capitalism. If art becomes an extension of daily

life it loses itself; it becomes a commodity among commodities, kitsch (Rosenberg, 1959: 267). Although kitsch was defined in of the second half of the 19th century in the Munich painting school, the phenomenon of kitsch is associated with human artistic creativity from its very beginning. The birth of the word “kitsch” shouldn’t be equated with the birth of the phenomenon it describes. This thesis results from the fact that kitsch lies on the opposite – to purely artistic creativity – pole of scale. Therefore, every creator, consciously or unconsciously, moves between these poles of ideal states.

Dictionary definitions of kitsch focus mainly on the meaning of a kitsch artefact instead of a kitsch phenomenon as a whole. The kitsch artefact means “something that appeals to popular or lowbrow taste and is often of poor quality (Merriam Webster, 2019), considered by many people to be ugly, without style, or false but enjoyed by other people, often because it’s funny” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019b). Synonymous words are: crap, debris, detritus, down-cycle, dross, effluent, influent, jetsam, jumble, junk, recycle, refuse, rubble, scrap, spoil, tat, upcycle, upcycling, waste product. Kitsch common features are: fundamentality, secondary nature, exaggeration, hysteria. The most popular themes of aesthetical kitsch are: patriotism, religion, erotism and politics. Starting from this point, we can conclude that kitsch likes primal instincts, which need primal fulfilment also. Kitsch answers for eternal need of emotion. From word “kitsch” there is close to the word “putty”, which refers to filling the gaps with easily adhering mass. It can be said that the essence of kitsch is “special quality, which evokes emotions in a sure and easy way, effective in human creations, with stereotypical features”. Because it isn’t an easy task to define what kitsch is, that’s why contemporary aesthetics theoreticians prefer the overview method of the kitsch artefact’s features (Banach, 1968: 24, 34-38).

Adorno perceived kitsch in terms of the “culture industry”, where the art is controlled and formulated by the needs of the market and given to a passive population which accepts it — what is marketed is art that is non-challenging and formally incoherent, but which serves its purpose of giving the audience leisure and something to watch. It helps to serve the oppression of the population by capitalism by distracting them from their alienation. Contrarily, art is supposed to be subjective, challenging, and oriented against the oppressiveness of the power structure. Kitsch is parody of catharsis, and a parody of aesthetic consciousness (Adorno, 2002). An important contribution to the kitsch definition process was adding ethics into the discourse: kitsch wants to act on the base of beauty (more “prettiness” than real beauty), not – like an art – on the base of the truth. Kitsch arises as a result of giving up the truth for the sake of prettiness. Kitsch isn’t a bad art; kitsch is an evil in art – it creates its own reference system. On the base of this approach, there is no possibility to use a previous-mentioned scale where on one side there is an art and on other side there is kitsch; art and kitsch can be perceived as the separate levels (Broch, 1969a).

Aesthetical theory created a concept of kitschification, which means the phenomenon of departing in the work from artistic values in favour of the features belonging to kitsch. Kitschification, as an aesthetic defence against reality, “normalizes” the painful episodes in history, neutralizing that history, trivializing that history, commercializing that history, and exploiting that history in such cases as Nazi history transformed into a consumable commodity (Saltzman, 2001: 55). It consists, instead, in a sentimentalised unreflective emotional appeal that manipulates emotions, distorts perceptions, reduces rationality and understanding, and avoids or suppresses unpleasant or disturbing aspects of reality (Kulka, 1996). On sufficient scale, and with a sufficient permeation of societal sectors, kitsch not only disables people’s capacity for aesthetic judgment, but also for political and moral judgement (Solomon, 1997). Kitsch is predominantly figurative, drawing on the conventions of 19th-century romanticism or socialist realism rather than abstract or cubist styles. One of its most characteristics traits is its use of the most conventional, standard, well-trying, and tested representational canons (Kulka, 1996: 29), rather than esoteric, idiosyncratic, original or innovative styles, since it must achieve an unchallenging, and effortless identifiability. Kitsch is aesthetically conservative and stylistically reactionary. It is universally accessible and easily understood. It is explicit and one-dimensional, lacking ambiguity, uncertainty or hidden meanings, and, by allowing for only one interpretation, is fundamental and dogmatic. It is pre-digested and pre-packaged “art” for the spectator, sparing effort and providing a short cut to pleasure without having to deal with the interpretive difficulty of genuine art; kitsch is mechanical and operates by formula. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations; it changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times; it pretends to demand nothing of its consumers except their money (Greenberg, 1985: 25).

Kitsch origins are located in romanticism, in debased form emphasising dramatic effects, pathos and sentimentality (Broch, 1969b), a hackneyed form of romanticism (Calinescu, 1987: 240). Some researchers dispute its modern origins: poor aesthetic taste of classical-period Roman merchants – the universal access to and proliferation of kitsch were only made possible by the economic conditions and mass culture of modern industrialism. The individual in a money economy becomes a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, spirituality and value. Acquisition becomes one of the central motives of modern capitalist society, resulting in a sensory numbing from mass production (Greenberg, 1985). Money, while serving to measure the relative value of objects, relegates human activity to an alienated margin; cultural objects increasingly evolve into an interconnected enclosed world that has increasingly fewer points at which the subjective soul can interpose its will and feelings; this trend is supported by a certain autonomous mobility on the part of the objects; both material and intellectual objects today move independently, without personal representatives or transport; objects and people have become separated from one another. In this manner, economic modes of interaction replace socially embedded ones, transforming every facet of life to fit into the logic of market exchange through commodification.

Based on the theory of “aesthetic situation” by Maria Gołaszewska (1984, Szostak, 2020; Szostak and Sułkowski, 2020), we can present the problem of the kitsch experience by showing its opposition to the aesthetic experience. To distinguish it from an artwork, we will call the kitsch product as “kitsch artefact”, whereas the kitsch creator as “kitsch producer/manufacturer”. The synthesis of the discussed phenomena is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. The Kitsch Experience vs the Aesthetic Experience.

<b>Element</b>	<b>Aesthetic Experience</b>	<b>Kitsch Experience</b>
Creator/Producer	focus on universal values	focus on mass recipient
	creative reliability	duplication, copying
	opened for criticism and discussion	closed for criticism and discussion
Work/Artefact	it has an advantage over the receiver	it is dominated by receiver’s (patriotic, religious, sexual, political) desires and needs
	it extends the recipient's existence	confirms the recipient's habits
	coherence	pretentiousness
	it fills the future based on the past	it fills the present
Receiver/Recipient	submission to a work of art	willingness to interfere with an artefact
	exclusivity	egalitarianism, mass scale
	willingness to consider the work from all sides/dimensions	choosing items to consider from the recipient's desires
	share of thought, awareness and will	avoidance of thought, consciousness and will (lack of reason, gullibility, irrationality)
	deep emotions, feelings	shallow and fleeting experience, sentimentalism
	internal contemplation	external experience
	need of loneliness	need of community
World of Values	dominant: truth	dominant: beauty (prettiness) and pleasure
Real World	source of creative inspiration	source of impulses to satisfy

*Source: Authors’ own elaboration.*

Creator of artwork – being reliable in his creativity – focuses on universal values and is open for criticism and discussion about his work. Kitsch producer – copying own or other’s ideas and patterns – focuses on mass recipient avoiding criticism. One motivation of the kitsch producer is to make something appear more valuable than it actually is. Kitsch is essentially deceptive – an artistic imposter, camouflaged as art: the whole concept of kitsch clearly centres around questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception or self-deception; it is a specifically

aesthetic form of lying (Calinescu, 1987: 229). Unreflective and uncritical, kitsch lends itself easily to the injection of propaganda and groupthink. It is confused with entertainment, attractiveness or fame, camouflages personal flaws, and is used to ingratiate. As dogma it is used to distract from important underlying realities, particularly those of contradiction and conflict, producing compliance and maintaining the status quo.

A work of art is coherent, it has an advantage over the receiver and – filling the future based on the past – it extends the recipient's current existence. Kitsch artefact is most often dominated by receiver's patriotic, religious, sexual and political desires and needs; it likes to confirm recipient's habits, to fill the present only shining with its pretentiousness. Artwork receiver is submissive to contemplated work, which gives him exclusivity and willingness to consider the work from all sides/spectrums; he needs to use his thought, awareness alone and will to contemplate deep emotions and feelings internally. The kitsch artefact lacks basic criteria of aesthetic values: unity, balance or harmony comprised of an inner logic of structure and style; complexity, multidimensionality, repleteness, combinations of heterogeneous forms, and elaboration of structures and detail; and intensity as vitality, forcefulness and vividness of presentation. The kitsch artefact also lacks the artistic value of creative and innovative contribution to the history of art – that is, opening new possibilities and suggesting solutions to topical artistic problems (Kulka, 1996), presenting an 'original' concept. It doesn't enrich our associations relating to the objects or themes, but rather is parasitic in nature since it doesn't create a beauty of its own. Essentially, kitsch artefacts lack provenance – they are disconnected from the original from which they are derived and lack considerations of sociohistorical context that in part add to their complexity but also their meaning.

Kitsch consumer wants to interfere with kitsch artefact by feeling egalitarianism of mass scale; he chooses items to consider from the recipient's desires avoiding his own thought, consciousness and will keeping his attention on external, fleeting and sentimental experiences preferably in the community of people in the same situation. Kitsch is easily understood by the consumer, doesn't question socio-political reality or vested interests, requires no great intellectual effort, reinforces our prejudices, avoids unpleasant conflicts, and promises a happy ending. We embrace images, popular actors, actresses, and musicians who, above and beyond their talents, have been given charismatic status despite – or perhaps because of – certain flaws in their character or theatrical skills. The appeal of kitsch to consumers resides not in the kitsch producer, its provenance, its contribution to the development of the arts, or even its social status. Kitsch is purchased as an end in itself because it satisfies an immediate desire and doesn't disturb our basic sentiments and beliefs. It also aims at universal rather than individual emotions, playing on the most common/lowest, denominator (Samier, 2008: 8-9). It is stirring but empty, serving primarily as a distraction. Kitsch, unlike art, doesn't accept the nature of things in the light of their critical or revelatory attributes, but to the extent which they cover and protect, relieve and console (Gregotti, 1969: 276). Kitsch mustn't question the basic metaphysical and moral assumptions of human existence the meaningfulness of our endeavours, the accepted moral code, and the meaning of life as such (Kulka, 1996: 97). It omits conflict producing the kitsch-man (Broch, 1969a).

Considering the world of values, in aesthetic experience we find domination of truth, but in kitsch experience – domination of prettiness and pleasure for the kitsch consumer. It can be said, that ethics is a distinguisher of kitsch. Real world is a source of creative inspiration in aesthetic experience, but a source of impulses to satisfy in experience of kitsch.

The development of the theory of kitsch phenomenon in aesthetics has been creatively adopted by management theory. The essence of the kitsch remains still the same: trivializing phenomena and reality, building appearances and moving away from the truth. As in aesthetics, kitsch in management is a departure from the truth. Management literature avoids answering the question of what organizational kitsch is; it focuses mainly on the description of its phenomenon. Trying to reach management area from the widest level, we collect kitsch manifestation in society, politics, religion, public administration, and education – finding management as the main denominator of all above levels.

#### *Kitsch in Human Activities*

McDonaldised (kitschified) society consists in four principles (Ritzer, 1996): 1) efficiency (the fastest way to satisfy a need); 2) calculability (an emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products, thereby

simplifying them); 3) predictability (the universal standardisation of products and services resulting in utter routinisation of thought and action); 4) control (the technological substitution of the non-human for the human). The primary purpose of kitsch socially and politically is in creating and perpetuating ideology and power structures: kitsch becomes totalitarian kitsch when it is a state policy, an approved way of understanding reality – dangerous not to admire it, more dangerous still to view it with irony. In this ideological context, kitsch takes on the status of dogma (Sabonis-Chafee, 1999: 365). Even in non-totalitarian contexts, kitsch has affected public policy. Public arts policy was used in the USA by liberals in the 1950s and 1960s to recruit art to support individuality, freedom and the superiority of the American way of life (Howard, 2004: 297). Similarly, the public art policy of Detroit that resulted in ‘easily assimilated’ imitative works posing as art. The new public ‘art’ was accepted as unproblematic by the citizens of Detroit since it lacked the provocative character of art, kitsch having substituted ‘user friendly’ installations that are unnoticeable elements of the urban environment aimed at covering, protecting, relieving and consoling (Hall, 1989: 328-329). The purpose of the policy was to beautify and ornament rather than challenge; if art becomes an extension of daily life it loses itself; it becomes a commodity among commodities (Rosenberg, 1959: 267). The preference for kitsch – exhibited by totalitarian regimes and, through extension, by authoritarian, top-down management styles – is that they can ingratiate themselves inexpensively with their subjects, and, unlike art, kitsch lends itself easily to the injection of propaganda (Greenberg, 1985: 30).

Kitsch can be found in all types of political systems. Socialist realism not only sanctioned but imposed kitsch, creating a “perfect world” of extravagant and socialist-realist theme parks, spectacular military parades, organised rallies, and gala atmosphere of party congresses. Capitalism requires kitsch exemplified in advertising using class distinctions and status symbols to create artificial needs and illusions to foster the ideology of the consumer society (Freidin, 2000: 134-135). Examples are buildings that imitate objects of desire: McDonald’s stands masquerading as hamburgers or gas stations as mushrooms, houses imitating the style of ancient Greece, and buildings in gambling resorts modelled on the Taj Mahal or the great pyramid of Cheops (Kulka, 1996: 104-105). Despite the fact that politicians are often bearers of ideals and ideologies, political kitsch is like box-office attractions in the field of entertainment. Political symbols – being often manifestation of kitsch – allow to serve a mobilising function in totalitarian regimes. Political kitsch symbols: 1) are easily understood; 2) call for an unreflective emotional response; 3) handle core values of a political regime or ideological system as a closed, harmonious entity endowed with beauty to make them more effective and 4) link truth and beauty leading to a stylisation capturing mythical patterns (Friedländer, 1990: 203).

Religion, as a manifestation of the spiritual life of man, is also not free from the kitsch phenomenon. Benoit Mathot (2015), based on the philosophical and aesthetic concepts of Hermann Broch, Milan Kundera and Slavoj Žižek, shows kitsch’s specific manifestations. Kitsch points to a blind path towards the external manifestations of the sacraments or liturgical rituals, which – without understanding their meaning based on the truths of faith – they are a blanket of empty gestures that lead to nothing (Pawek, 1969).

Kitsch is also an effect of globalisation: another mass product of Western industrialism, it has gone on a triumphal tour of the world, crowding out and defacing native cultures in one colonial country after another, becoming the first universal culture (Greenberg, 1985: 26). This process also describes the kitschified version of public administration, the New Public Management (NPM), a private-sector-style managerial ideology for the public sector adopted in the 1980s internationally (regardless of its lack of relevance in many jurisdictions). The NPM subjects public organisations to market concepts and forces that both theoretically and practically have been criticised and deemed highly problematic if not a failure (Samier, 2008: 7-8).

In a consumer society predicated upon instant gratification – expectations of success without hard work or without facing resistance and conflict – educational administration is transformed into a practice that comforts and reassures its audience. Leadership and policy kitsch’s preferential characteristics as providing psychological comfort, reinforcing mythologies, predictability, and creating a sense of history, culture and reality that constitutes the ‘beautiful lie’. It is the same underlying principles that are at the heart of the corporatisation and commercialisation of education, which has led to the transfer of authority from faculty to administration, conflict between Senates and Boards of Governors that erodes collegial governance, and a community of scholars based primarily on the vagaries of the

intellectual market (Lugg, 1999). Educational administration analogues are the leadership books that provide easy guidelines for becoming an effective leader, the many claims of leadership for all (reducing the qualifications to a mediocre level achievable by anyone), and superficial professional workshops that reduce complex moral theory to simplified rules. Intellectual kitsch – just as kitsch religion provides spirituality without the requirement of orthodox belief and action (Klinghoffer, 1996: 259) – kitsch administration gleans only the most superficial aspects of social reality. Organisationally it produces a total or comprehensive kitschification. Such principles pervade many teaching approaches aimed at making learning entertaining and effortless, including many of the learning organisation models promising a painless and conflict-free path to organisational improvement. The teaching of educational politics substituting anecdotes and war stories for political theory and analysis produces a course lacking foundational theory and rigorous examination of empirical studies. Without a scholarly foundation even the more insightful and penetrating use of war stories as a complex and sophisticated form of narrative, phenomenological and hermeneutic source is lost – it requires no knowledge, understanding, critique nor analysis.

### *Kitsch in Management*

Looking for sources of kitsch in management, we can consider the growing pace of life and conducting business as one of the most important factors. A fast pace of functioning requires quick decisions; managers have less and less time for relevant analyses, hence the search for universal and simple rules is becoming a natural solution. These rules – often far from the “truth” – act as a remedy for problems and fill the features of kitsch. Analysis of kitsch in area of management created many own optics/metaphors of kitsch, f.eg.: Kitsch as Eternal Return, Kitsch as Human-Centred, Kitsch as Mass Sentiment or Kitsch as Defence Mechanism (Linstead, 2002: 662). Because management concerns various types of organizations – from small teams to entire societies – so descriptions of the kitsch phenomenon in management to date are rather selective and treat selected topics analytically.

Bullshit is unavoidable whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about: businessmen, politicians, PR specialists and consultants, forced to talk about any topic, can produce bullshit. Bullshit undoubtedly constitutes the concepts of many management gurus, promoted through their consultancy work and by offering the philosopher’s stone of business, the frequent purpose of which is flattering the managers’ egos. Sources of the expansion of Bullshit Management (BSM) include attempts to comment on every issue, attempts to dominate the discourse, repeating the same fashionable concepts, and lack of criticism in the scientific discourse (Sułkowski, 2019). BSM can draw on CMS theory by drawing on the definition of BSM as regular and instrumental manipulation of recipients using communication and social actions. But BSM should be exposed both within the theoretical discourse and in managerial practice. This is part of the revealing of false consciousness and symbolic violence that conceal the structures of power (Waring, 1998). Ways of resistance against managerial bullshit are: demystification and resistance that could be described as weapons of the weak (Scott, 2008).

We can distinguish between two types of kitsch: 1) common kitsch that tends toward universality, and 2) uplifting kitsch which is rooted, symbol-centred, and emotionally linked to the values of a specific group – much like decontextualized leadership training programmes (Friedländer, 1990: 203). Contrived and inauthentic kitsch is found in organisational practices like creating mascots and company songs through executive decision rather than emerging naturally from the culture. Kitsch sanitises socio-political reality: kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence; a categorical agreement with being is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it didn’t exist; it dilutes meaning (Kundera, 1990).

We need to mention here the bureaucracy also. Bureaucrats follow laws and rules without much thinking if these make sense or not. Followers willingly let their leaders do the thinking for them. Employees habitually avoid negative thinking and look on the bright side. People adapt to norms and expectations of others. They often jump on new fashions and fall for seductively formulated solutions. In each of these cases, people are thinking – but only in the most narrow and circumscribed ways. People are often competent, intelligent and clever within these established limits (Alvesson, 2018).

## Results of the Research

We can distinguish two results of our research, which answer the basic initial questions. The first result are characteristic forms kitsch in management. The second result are carriers and propagators of organisational kitsch. Finally, the management kitsch definition is established.

## Discussion and Interpretation of Results

This part is divided on three groups: 1) description of characteristic forms of kitsch in management; 2) description of carriers and propagators of organisational kitsch; and 3) definition of management kitsch.

### *Characteristic Forms of Kitsch in Management*

There are characteristic forms of kitsch in management such as: 1) one best way claim; 2) simplification; 3) grandiosity; 4) organisational cynicism; 5) functional stupidity; 6) bullshit jobs; 7) seeming management.

Management belongs to social disciplines because the object of analysis are organizations created by people who, knowing the results of the research, adjust their behaviour reflectively; it means that the research subject itself is constantly changing. The ability to influence the directions of these changes is a powerful ideological tool that allows to manipulate the society. That is why there is a subtle and hidden pressure to conduct some research directions and limit others. In management, there are less frequent threads of rationalization of ownership and management, instrumental treatment of human resources, manipulative aspects of marketing, total organization or symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1985: 93-94; Sułkowski, 2003). On the other hand, research areas and publications legitimizing the existing social order are exposed and financed. We can observe two trends that significantly limit the possibilities of communication consensus. On the one hand, we are dealing with an increase in the capacity and ambiguity of basic concepts, and on the other, with a growing terminology specialization in management sub-disciplines. Many basic management terms are ambiguous and resemble a “family of words”. This is the case with organization, enterprise as well as management, structure, strategy or organizational culture. At the same time, management has its own specialized terminology within each sub-discipline. The language of reflection is increasingly condensed and less transparent, and thus the discourse is encapsulated. An additional language problem is the abundant use of terms from other disciplines and from life, which is a jumble of difficult rhetoric and phraseology. Fractal, learning, intelligent, vibrating, virtual and organic organizations are useful metaphors that are, however, difficult to define. Management, hiding behind the smoky curtain of jargon, is becoming more and more hermetic and instead of demanding openness of communication, we are dealing with the closure of small circles of specialists within our own sub-disciplines (Andreski, 2002: 66). On the other hand, we have “management shamans” who, rejecting the theoretical achievements of the discipline, use simple and colloquial language categories, which allows them to attract crowds of followers; they found their place and publicity with simple diagnosis for all organisational problems perfectly.

The problem arising in connection with the increase in the importance and popularity of management is confrontation with the values of post-industrial society. The area of management is increasingly dominated by the rules of the “mass intellectual goods” market. The demand for “recipes for market success” has been created. Management gurus, consulting companies and managers promote management ideas and works aimed at achieving the highest possible sales rate. Therefore, commercial criteria are beginning to prevail over cognitive values. This doesn't mean that outstanding managers or advisers don't create management achievements, but only that it loses its scientific character by becoming an area of mass culture (scientific truth gives way to superficial “prettiness”). When analysing the problem of the management idea commercialization, it's worth paying attention to the popularization issue. Dissemination of science is a process of bringing complex theories and discoveries to researchers so that they become accessible to society (Kozłowski, 2003: 18). In management, the sphere of creation and popularization of science are completely mixed. The mass goods market has created conditions in which the “production” of overly simplified ideas is a substitute for real discourse. And yet scientific cognition isn't egalitarian, so by definition the results of scientific work are of an academic/specialist nature, and only later should they be simplified and popularized. Meanwhile, in managing the standard is the creation of science as “mass theoretical products”, which

are the intellectual equivalent of fast food, which by their simplicity and obviousness are to appeal to all interested parties (researchers, students, managers). It is no wonder that the problem of producing scientific banality corrupts the reputation of management. Critics point out the terminology based on colloquial terms and the lack of in-depth research, which creates room for “management shamans” (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2000a: 19-20). This leads to the sad conclusion for the academic community that management is at the stage of epistemological development comparable to tribal medicine, while at the stage of social development it is approaching show business. Management serves as an example of science, which too strong connection with the market and commercial categories can lead to cognitive pathologies (Amsterdamski, 1994). Simplification, as a way of social standardisation can be seen in many types of fiction organisations: communist organisations of youth, totalitarian organisations or artificial West-capitalist organisations always happy and ready to action while singing their company’s hymn (Kostera, 1997).

Grandiosity refers to delusions of grandeur, characteristic of individuals with severe disturbances regarding their own qualities and significance. It can be observed in obsessions of dictators and other leaders constructing monuments to commemorate themselves or to leave a lasting legacy. Grandiosity is linked the narcissism of our times and a generalized craving to enhance self-esteem. The appeal of grandiosity and the social pressures to enact it create significant obstacles for management learning. Topics and methods signalling something glamorous and narcissistically satisfying attain great currency, uncritically seducing students into naïve acceptance of superficial and dubious knowledge (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2015). The ethos of grandiosity is one of the factors that has led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the functions and nature of management in today’s organizations. Instead of a preoccupation with efficient production and rational administration, management is seen as increasingly seeking to bewitch the consumer with the magical, the fantastic and the alluring (Ritzer, 1999). Narcissistic individuals seeking to enhance their self-image easily embrace an employing organization’s glamorous image and allure as a means of supporting and nurturing their self-identities. Today’s organizations, imbued as they are with an ethos of grandiosity, are very liable to be led by narcissistic leaders. They can easily inspire their followers with their visions and can turn around moribund organizations and groups. The ethos of grandiosity brings organizations much closer to their consumers (Gabriel, 2005). Far from being outsiders to the world of organizations, consumers are being drawn into each organization’s corporate fantasy, invited not only to purchase goods and services but a wide range of glamorized images, signs and symbols (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2015). The inflation of grandiosity labels is common: groups have become teams, groups with senior managers become “executive teams” or “top teams”; rationalization is “business process engineering” and management training takes the form of “executive development programmes”. A whole new vocabulary of buzzwords and euphemisms has emerged, fuelled by the activities of management gurus and disseminated through MBA programmes, where simple tasks are elevated to heroic status and mundane calculations are turned into glamorous undertakings (Collins, 2000; Jackson, 2001). Grandiosity involves representing or loading phenomena in a way that makes them appear to be as attractive and extraordinary as possible, without being perceived as obviously fake. Issues of substance are marginalised.

Stupidity is often associated with low intelligence, but in a social context there is no clear link between people’s IQ and their actual thinking and action. Clever people may do stupid things: in private life and at work, where social forces may be in operation. Functional stupidity involves narrow thinking, where established frameworks are accepted uncritically. Most workplaces seek to encourage and cultivate critical thinking, reflection and ‘out of the box’ ideas, yet they often remain better at doing the opposite. Managers and subordinates follow organisational and professional templates and cultures without paying much attention to assumptions and beliefs. In the kitsch context, the main aspects of functional stupidity are: 1) an absence of reflexivity: stop asking questions about the assumptions; rules/routines/norms are seen as completely natural; 2) not seeking cause or a good reason: stop asking ‘why’; a rule is a rule and it must be followed, even if no one is clear why it exists; 3) lack of substantive reasoning: stop asking about the wider consequences of actions (Alvesson, 2018).

The Cynics – back to fourth century Greece – very openly questioned the existence of government and religious institutions. Cynicism was revived as a school of thought and propagated the idea of mockery of convention and tradition and prevailing beliefs and modes of behaviour. Organizational cynicism emerged as the new paradigm of employer-employee relations. A significant percentage of employees

are highly cynical about their organizations. Organizational cynicism arises when employees lack confidence in their organization and feel that the organization cannot be trusted. Definitions of organizational cynicism are associated with emotions such as disillusionment and anger. Organizational cynicism is divided into five distinct structures: 1) personal cynicism, 2) societal cynicism, 3) cynicism towards change, 4) work cynicism, 5) employee cynicism. Organizational cynicism comprises of three distinct dimensions: 1) cognitive cynicism, 2) affective cynicism, 3) behavioural cynicism (Durrah and al, 2019).

Bullshit job is a task (workplace, profession) whose disappearance wouldn't cause any noticeable change in the environment and would be accepted with indifference of the employee. There are five types of bullshit jobs: 1) making someone (client, boss) feel important: assistants, porters, elevator operators; 2) absolute solicitation of the interests of their principals: lobbyists, corporate lawyers, telemarketers, PR/marketing specialists; 3) solving problems that could be avoided with better organization: programmers with difficulty improving prematurely sold software, people accepting complaints; 4) generating documents, procedures and rituals instead of the real, needed action: performance managers, creators of magazines distributed among the company's employees, authors of intranet blogs; 5) managing people who do not need management or setting additional responsibilities that don't make sense but take time: medium level managers, leadership specialists (Graeber, 2019).

When a manager has no goals/plans for the future of the organisation, and the organisation is running with its own speed and direction, we can speak about the seeming management. Kitsch manager tries to keep his top position artificially, on the surface only. Seeming management connected with narcissistic personality of the manager can be very dangerous situation for the organisation, creating delusion situations (Sismondo, 2018).

*Carriers and Propagators of Organisational Kitsch*

Based on the phenomena presented in the review of the literature, we can distinguish three types of management process participants, which can be called as carriers and propagators of organisational kitsch or just as management kitschists: 1. management gurus; 2. narcissistic managers, 3. mendacious CEOs and owners. Guru is a concept derived from Sanskrit and signifies "a spiritual master who gives advices" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019a), but in science the emphasis should be placed not on trusting the guru but on critical cognitive reflection. Guru is a role that means a distortion of both cognitive and practical management trends (Pinnington, 2001). One can ask the question, where did the role of the guru come from, which unfortunately is becoming more and more widespread in "home-grown" management. The reasons are varied and are rooted in both the subject of the discipline and its social environment (Andreski, 2002). Management, as a discipline, is extremely susceptible to the occurrence of the guru phenomenon for several reasons: 1) it concerns – in the vast majority – organizations focused on financial profit, so guru's "prescriptions" are an easy investment with a potentially high rate of return in a short time; if ready and simple solutions are applied, the profits will begin to flow in a wide stream; 2) concerns a phenomenon occurring commonly: everyone manages something and struggles with problems in the managed area, so simple solutions come with great interest; 3) verifying the guru's theses isn't easy: it is enough for the guru to have above-average wealth, which justifies his role and theories he proposes; in this case, scientific justifications aren't required. The guru role in the comparison to social roles of scholars in management is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Social roles of scholars in management.

<b>Social Role</b>	<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Practice</b>	<b>Guru</b>
Subject of Study	organization as an object of scientific cognition (finding out the truth)	organization as a place of social knowledge transmission	organization as a subject to change	organization as an object of intuitive cognition and changes
Approach to the Achievements of Discipline	building on management achievements (theorizing)	popularizing management achievements	adaptation of the pragmatic methodology of discipline	declaration of rejection of achievements

Seeking Confidence	pursuit of high probability	striving to pass the canon of probable knowledge	operating in conditions of uncertainty	suggesting certainty
Concentration Cognition vs Action	concentration on cognition	concentration on communication	focus on activities	focus on activities
Professional Ethos	scientist and researcher	academic teacher	consultant	shaman and prophet
Perfect Auditorium	the scientific community	students	employees, managers and clients	followers – businessmen

*Source: Authors' own elaboration.*

Management guides are popular on the publishing market and in cyberspace, whose authors are “management gurus” focusing more on self-marketing than on the transmission of reliable knowledge. They break with the tradition of real masters of management (Drucker, Kotler, Ansoff), who combined popularization with reliable theory skilfully. On the other hand, however, an advisory sector has emerged between the business sectors and other organizations and business schools, which makes little use of academic output and research, which deepens the gap between management theory and practice. The concepts promoted in consulting are – for marketing purposes – presented in an uncritical way, which in the long run reduces the authority of management sciences. F.e.g., a non-reflective approach to reengineering, value management and organizational culture, and unsuccessful attempts to apply these concepts have aroused the distrust of many managers and have distanced them from the research community. Multiplying management guru concepts that pretend to be a philosopher's stone for managers are usually not of a scientific nature. They are characterized by tautological construction, excessive simplification of complexity, inability to verify, in which they resemble concepts of pseudoscience such as astrology (Wilson, 2000). Management gurus often exploit utopian motives by referring to the vision of an ideal organization leading to perfect social order (Reedy, 2002: 175-176); as an example we can use Senge's concept of “learning organization” described as the basis for a “knowledge-oriented society” (Senge, 1993). The management guru focuses on the process of intuitive cognition that is supposed to cause changes (Peters, 1994). Managerial culture is based on authorities that are socially produced and reflect the structures of power. Some influential management representatives occupy the position of gurus instead of reflective and critical researchers. Gurus are therefore “heroes” and the most important promoters of oppressive culture and managerial ideology. Gurus “producing” the most widespread guides and simple and “practical” management concepts focus on a clear, “contagious” idea combined with effective marketing. Gurus are read because their concepts “seduce”, so: 1) they don't require deeper reflection, 2) they are simple in understanding and remembering, 3) they have an element of “shocking” news, 4) they are lectured in a simple, non-academic language. Contrary to appearances, the gurus aren't rebels destroying existing power structures, but on the contrary they support them. They play the role of “cultural industry” in management. They create media interest in management concepts and structures, sanctioning the obvious and natural nature of this order. They bother their minds with peculiar “memes” of contagious concepts, at the same time postponing reflection on fundamental issues for organizations such as power and justice. Gurus try to “program the minds” of managers in accordance with the interests of those in power (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2000b: 9). The “cultural industry” of the guru is supported by mass advertising, PR and scientific marketing activities that lead to building the position of “idols” for managers. Gurus are treated in a special way in management, because their publications are of a popular nature and don't meet scientific rigors, and therefore they are relatively rarely criticized by the scientific community. It is also worth noting that because relationships with practice, the consultancy sector are an inherent feature of management understood as a practical scientific discipline, writing for practitioners and managers is a value in itself. Some management gurus from the past (Drucker, Kotler, Ansoff) also popularized research results and created valuable scientific achievements, sometimes constituting the foundations for entire sub-disciplines of management. Concluding this area, we can say, that there is a need of translation of science but in understandable way for untrained readers, otherwise this field will be (still) filled naturally by management kitschists.

The second group of carriers and propagators of organizational kitsch are narcissistic managers who build self-centred and professional-centred constructs in management practice. Putting the truth/merits of processes aside, they focus on the superficiality of actions and creating their own role in the organization. In this case, the organization becomes a means to build and fuel its own myth, not a tool to achieve business goals. The myth of Narcissus is permanently present in the history of mankind, because it opposes the phenomenon of self-worship, which is an immanent feature of human nature. The problem begins when narcissism becomes a significant or dominant personality trait. The need for narcissistic confirmation is not a new phenomenon, nor does it necessarily lead to grandiose delusions, disproportionate emphasis on image and presentation or constant craving for recognition, approval and praise. What is new is the generalized culture of narcissism (Lasch, 1980) which suffuses late-capitalism's where people become obsessed with trying to build a positive self-image, often through consumption of objects, experiences and brands. The effects of narcissistic attitudes on managers can be many: from deteriorating organizational efficiency, through demotivating employees, to creating fiction and artificial reality that can put the organization's vigilance and credibility to sleep.

The third group of carriers and propagators of organizational kitsch consists of mendacious CEOs and owners who – pretending to create and implement a mission in the organization – focus exclusively on revenue and profit maximisation. It can be said that efficiency (profitability) is a natural goal of any organization, but in this case we emphasize the element of false mission building, which is a fraud, giving up the truth (the basic feature of art) in favour of pretending to be external “prettiness” (the basic feature of kitsch). The presence of professional ethics can be here an important factor of distinction (Callahan, 1988).

#### *Definition of Management Kitsch*

After analysing the phenomenon of kitsch in aesthetics and based on the concept of an aesthetic situation (Gołaszewska, 1984), which concept is deformed by the kitsch-practitioners stripping off an element of universal values, kitsch in management – according to us – can be defined as “behaviours/manifestations/activities/attitudes in the organization deviating from an universal value of truth (understand as intended action) in favour of appearances and external forms”.

### **Conclusions, Limitations and Perspectives**

Kitsch in aesthetics – in relation to art – is clearly perceived negatively; even literally as an evil (Broch, 1969a). Kitsch in management is commonly perceived much less negatively, more mildly because the argument about the basic financial goal of business (profitability) acts as a justification for all (even unethical) methods of operation. BSM – on the flow of CMS – acts against kitsch in management. On the base of this research, it can be concluded that well developed aesthetical theory of kitsch can be used for understanding and developing of the kitsch phenomenon in management. Management kitsch features, kitsch carriers and propagators in organisations need to be clearly defined and possibly reduced for better effects and quality of organizational life.

Limitations of the research are as follows: 1) the matter of art is ephemeral and the matter of management is very real; not all kitsch features in aesthetics are applicable in the field of management; 2) as in the case of aesthetics, one shouldn't moralise over kitsch in management nor validate it; the kitsch phenomenon was, is and will be always; it should be studied and understood to the widest extent possible – assessing kitsch can affect the reliability of tests; 3) positive effects of kitsch in management can be found (e.g. creating myths around newly created businesses to facilitate market access) – although they are not long-term (life verifies all myths) and shouldn't be recommended as intentional methods of action.

Perspectives of the research are as follows: 1) deep studies in aesthetics as a possibility to next comparisons and conclusions in management; 2) development of kitsch in aesthetics as predictions for kitsch in management; 3) constant mix of kitsch and art gives the eternal perspective for the area of management kitsch studies.

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