



Arteconomy creates and cultivates an innovative spirit that generates process - product innovation and artworks.

Julie Vandenbroucke, president of Arteconomy Belgium.

In his book 'A whole new mind' (2006), Daniel Pink claims that the ability to grasp 'the big picture' will be the key skill of the future, the skill which will allow employees to really make a difference. In a world where factors other than functionality and cost price have long been at play, and where design, symphony and meaningfulness are destined to become the most important criteria, the need for open and creative innovation is greater than ever before. Forward-looking organizations are constantly searching for effective ways to make their organizational culture better prepared for the realization of this new mission.

Arteconomy (2002), a Flemish non-profit intermediary, has developed a method for cultivating an innovative spirit within organisations. We bring businesspeople and artist together in unique projects. The basic concept behind this intermediary is the growing awareness that art and economics are not two separate worlds, but two aspects of a single creative process that contributes towards the development of society as a whole.

Collaboration between art and the economy is still often considered in both worlds as 'art on the fringe' or 'not generating effectiveness'. At the basis of this reaction lies the unilateral focus on the materiality of the artwork or of the company product instead of the importance of the whole environment of the company, the culture of the company. However, the developing process of creation, of innovation and the immaterial role of people in the whole process deserve equal attention.

Arteconomy shifts the focus towards the connections between people: the artist, the entrepreneur and the employee. The most important elements in formulating these relationships are development, partnership, co-creation, engagement, aesthetic intelligent leadership, competences, knowledge. The starting point is simple, when relationships come first, the material art work or the company end product can follow. Arteconomy is a breeding ground for innovation and creativity, for artists as well as for companies.

The concept of Arteconomy

We offer the expertise to develop a partnership between artist and entrepreneur which starts an active exchange of each other's concepts, ways of thinking and working, in order to create and cultivate an innovative spirit by both .

There are 4 ways in which art can be introduced into a company. To use the words of Lotte Darsø, art can be used as decoration, entertainment, instrument or integrated as a process of transformation. The two first ways focus more on earning money, the third and fourth emphasize more on added value and creation between both partners. Art can play a role in all departments of a company: from research & development to human resources, from marketing and production to communication. Arteconomy does not shun any of these four approaches; however, it does intend that art projects in a company set something in motion and lead to new concepts.

The role of Arteconomy

Arteconomy is an intermediary, advisor and process coach. Its role is to make the connection between artist and enterprise and find a suitable partner for concrete projects, to formulate their needs, to create social effect in society and to stimulate research. The vision of the intermediary determines the result of such collaboration. Its neutrality is essential. That means that it helps to bridge the gulf between the artists and the companies by offering support to both sides in their efforts to define and organise their collaboration. This attitude avoids the instrumentalisation of art or the economy. The organisation refers also to others and engages experts for specific challenges.

Some guidelines in the approach as process coach :

- The *communication* is *at a meta-level*, not at the level of the product. The notion of ‘the expert’ does not prevail. The artist, the entrepreneur and the employee meet each other as persons in their way of thinking and/or in what touches their soul. This way people will discover common grounds and diversity can become a challenge or an opportunity for both. The relational aspect determines the potential and the term of the project. Sometimes the similarities seem bigger than the differences.
- The aim is that the *responsibility* to the project will be going beyond the collaboration in itself.
- *To turn failing into learning* and daring to disconnect in order to attain a better connection. Change and innovation are the results of flexible connection and disconnection. Resistance is turned into trust by encouraging repetition and transposition — putting oneself into what the other person stands for.
- *Project follow-up* is necessary to increase the results and to offer a solid base for collaboration.

Some key principles of setting up innovative projects

- *The initiative* can come from a company, an organization or an artist.
- Openness, respect, courage, confidence, belief, real commitment and *generosity* of all participants towards each other is necessary.
- *The match* between artist and company culture determines the course and the result of a collaboration project. The artist’s personality and his concept constitute an important key to the result. An equally decisive factor is the motivating leadership that the entrepreneur is showing towards the project and his ability to establish a top-down as well as a bottom-up connection in his company. He should give the project the necessary space and freedom on all levels.
- *Aligning the vision and the intention* of the partners involved is decisive to maintain the individuality of each partner.
- *Financial agreements* between the partners are made at the start of the project.

The Arteconomy projects aim at economic, social and artistic innovation. We are interested in both long- term and short-term projects.

Two different cases ‘The Dragon of Deerlijk’ , a long-term project in the textile world and an ‘Atelier of co-creation ‘ , a short-term project of the IT world.

1. ‘The Dragon of Deerlijk’ a process of change in the textile – world. (2008-2009)

Promo Fashion is a rapidly growing company in the textiles sector in Belgium employing 280 people, selling clothing for men, women, and children. Promo Fashion is a good company to work for, judging by the fact that it came sixth in the ‘Best Employer’ polls for 2007.

In the past, Promo Fashion’s art-loving business manager Michel Delfosse was the driving force behind a wide variety of artistic and cultural activities organised within his company. The working

environment has changed completely over the past few years. For example, the staff was consulted about the purchase of new office furniture. A Dutch artist designed a very unusual collection for them.

Promo Fashion is a family business. As was typical of such companies, in the past management tended to be imposed on the staff from above. M.Delfosse dreams of evolving towards a company culture where the employees take more initiative and speak out more readily. Personally, he thinks that his employees are less aware of the need for change.

After coming into contact with Arteconomy, M.Delfosse decided to start up a project to address this need. *“I want to try and bring about a cross-fertilisation of ideas between fundamentally different visions. This does not mean that I necessarily expect our people to agree with the artist’s way of thinking. For me, it’s about being open to these perspectives and showing understanding of a different perspective on ‘people in general’ and on the world we live in.”*

Arteconomy went looking for an artist who could generate this kind of thought-provoking reaction within his company. There was no need for the artist to be familiar with textiles or fashion, after all, the project was more about the perception of fashion and textiles than about its reality- but it was necessary to believe in what M.Delfosse was trying to achieve. The artist Els Opsomer was immediately intrigued. She wanted to build several fields of tension into the project. She not only saw a possible conflict between the needs of the local and the global economy, but was also struck by the stark contrast between the ‘glitzy’ design world of Promo Fashion, with its impressive reception area and modern offices, and the ‘dark and dusty’ backrooms of the business where the real work was being done. There was an immediate liking between the artist and the manager. Once she had visited Promo Fashion and met with some of the employees to discuss the content of the project, she proposed a new work ‘The Dragon of Deerlijk’ within the walls of the company: *“I chose a dragon because of its symbolic value and also because it didn’t necessarily need to have a specific shape. The dragon refers to Asia and in particular to China, where a large proportion of the textile industry is concentrated. As an artist, the space to create something new and the time to allow it to mature are important factors. You need blind trust in your ability to surrender to that creative ‘emptiness’, in order to achieve the desired end result. This is a delicate process, and one which is often sacrificed at an early stage in favour of economic security. Trusting in your own imagination and refusing to dismiss your creativity, no matter how ‘silly’ it might sometimes seem: these are lessons that I can offer to people in the business world.”*

Els Opsomer’s proposal was accepted by Michel Delfosse and was presented to the employees. Their involvement with the project was tangible right from the start. Their willingness to join in was considerable, although their own creative contributions during the initial meetings was very limited.

The physical presence of the artist in the company was clearly a requirement. She was given a place to work close to the staff, where she could be seen and heard.

But things did not go as well as had been hoped. Some had imagined that ‘joining in with the project’ would be more than just helping out with the sewing on a couple of afternoons. For others, the whole business was just a silly waste of time that stopped you from getting on with your own work. Frustration arose. Michel Delfosse and Els Opsomer both recognised the importance of these tensions and agreed that they needed to be taken seriously. In consultation with Arteconomy in its role as a process coach, M.Delfosse decided to organise an anonymous survey of the people involved in the project, in order to find out what the problems were.

The survey was followed by a meeting to discuss the results. This meeting made it clear that the employees were not really enjoying the project. They liked contributing to the artwork and they were interested in the basic idea, but they didn’t feel sufficiently involved. They felt that their role was too passive, like workers on a production line who were merely carrying out a predetermined task. They wanted more influence. Their main complaint was that they couldn’t really be creative because everything *“had to be done as the artist wanted it”*. Their creativity was limited. They had the impression that it had been decided in advance that they were going to make a dragon, whether they liked it or not. In short, ‘their’ project had been hijacked!

This was an interesting discovery for M.Delfosse and Opsomer. It was a very different reaction from the one at the beginning of the project, when the manager and the artist both felt that the employees

were not too concerned about their own influence and were not very articulate in expressing their wishes. However, by being involved in the artwork in a passive manner, their behaviour and opinions gradually began to change. Their interest was stimulated, even to the point of friction. They had ideas about the concept behind the artwork and they wanted to express these ideas. This led to renewed commitment towards the project. More significantly, the employees saw the importance of making their own contribution-which was precisely the intention behind the entire venture.

Michel Delfosse described it as follows: “...*The most important thing for me was that I could see that the demand for influence, consultation and responsibility had grown among my employees, precisely because of the frustrations which they had experienced through working on the project. Something was brewing. ... The project might not have resulted in major ‘business’ developments and personal changes, but nonetheless there is a growing need for involvement throughout the company, and an understanding of its importance and value.*”

2. ‘Atelier of Co-Creation’ with the focus on products in the IT world. (2009-2010)

Co-creation grows between two totally different disciplines and generates concrete concepts, proposals for elaboration and innovative work processes in a very short time span.

In a short format of four afternoons three or four artists meet as many entrepreneurs. The aim is the development of a product or a process with the stress on product innovation. A tight format and strong coaching promote a certain degree of efficiency that can serve as a starting point for joint projects. Finally Arteconomy wants to create a pool where they can regularly meet and where new collaborative projects can grow. This concept was first introduced by MAD Emergent Art Center (Paul Desmedt, Rene Paré) in The Netherlands for a Creative Challenge Call.

The results of two Ateliers of Co-Creation

Atelier of Co-Creation I a joint initiative of Arteconomy and Arts Centre Buda with the support of the enterprise Domotic.Lounge.

This Atelier led to the following collaborative ventures:

- UMO - Unidentified Moving Object: Kris Verdonck, stage manager and enterprise dZine do research regarding technical improvement of a video screen that is transparent. For dZine this is a commercial opportunity that enables it to exchange the window models in textile shops for moving models who show the new fashion. For the stage manager it means an interesting track for a new artistic project, this screen will enable him to put animals on stage in a special way.
- GPS - Great Parental Steering System: Eric Joris, artist and IT enterprise Indie Group develop a computer game that will make children forget boredom during long car rides. Indie Group can discover a new market opportunity, for the artist the new insights are inspiring for his artistic career.
- The process of slowness: artist Yves Coussement will invite the employees of Traficon to dedicate one working day in a fortnight solely to creative ideas. Yves serves as a catalyst to induce the staff to reach this enhanced creativity.

Atelier of Co-Creation II a joint venture by Arteconomy and plugMedia,

This Atelier led to the following collaborative projects:

- A video-project for dance: Ugo Dehaes, artist and IT enterprise One Agency examined the thin line between life and death, and its unbearable lightness. This became a video project that can be used during dance performances.
- Online exhibition tool: Narcisse Tordoir, artist and IT enterprise Netlash developed an online exhibition tool for an artist to present his work.
- Multitouch: Rudi Bogaerts, artist, and IT enterprise Dreams and Creations conceived the Multitouch project for museums and other cultural organisations. More commercial applications will be developed in the future.

- You Theatre: Timothy Segers, artist, and IT intermediary plugMedia want to give people a voice and stimulate spontaneous performances by means of You Theatre, an installation in public spaces.

The mistake in these Ateliers of Co-Creation was that the clients, the Art Center Buda and plugMedia, didn't want to spend money on the necessary follow-up of these projects by the intermediary Arteconomy. They made the mistake as many do at the beginning, that once both sides are connected and it seems to work well, this connection will automatically continue. But it doesn't, that kind of connection is very fragile and support by an intermediary during the whole process is necessary to get a good result. That's why the products of these Ateliers never left their conceptual stage. Of course, after some experience both sides can grow in this matter and evolve to do it by themselves.

Projects of Arteconomy as added value

The introduction of art projects into a company holds a mirror to the company and it sharpens the entrepreneurial spirit. The artist is confronted with a reality that is otherwise inaccessible to him or her.

Added value for the companies/organizations:

- **For the culture of the company/organization :**
 - **Personal development:** for the company staff these projects are a concrete gateway to developing a creative attitude. Openness to the visions of other people grows on them. Employees discover hidden qualities within themselves and their co-workers. While group dynamics are essential, creativity also requires space for the individual and his empowerment. These art projects are also an emotional experience, they relate to a total relationship and not only to data. The immediate effect is not always measurable but a new, human dimension gets a real chance for growth.
 - Internal **communication** increases and can develop a more horizontal organizational chart.
 - Creative attitude and insight in the **creative process** and a different approach to **time** : both the complexity of the concept and going through the process of realization make the group of people involved very conscious of the idea from concept to end result. It breaks the casualness. But on the other hand, employees grow conscious of the creative process in itself, mirroring that of the artist. The integration of the process requires the necessary time. Being confronted with the time experience of the artist generates reflection on how time is dealt with in the company. Working together with an artist requires taking and giving time, being patient, letting the process do its job. That time cannot be limited in order to get a short-term result.
 - Dealing with **limitations and responsibilities** : having to cope with time, budget, space and the limitations of co-operation between companies and the art world makes people understand that thinking together and having proper input are extremely important. More than before, employees question certain situations and search for solutions themselves. The challenge is to integrate these limitations into the project in a responsible way. Frustration sometimes leads to conflicts within the project group. If this can be steered in a positive way, it results in a demand for more insight and responsibility. Uncertainty and doubt form a breeding ground for taking decisions and continuing on the creative path.
- **For the R&D:** creation and co-creation of new concepts, products, services and processes
- **For the stakeholders and society in general** : these projects give a lot of visibility and an interesting employer branding. It increases networking, external collaboration expertise and social corporate responsibility
- **New start-ups** : the alchemy of art and the economy can lead to new start-ups on both sides. .

Added value for the artist:

- **Artistic freedom:**
 - The Vlerick Management School and Ivok (Institute for Research in the Arts) research findings are formal: in the Arteconomy projects, the artists maintain their artistic freedom. Their function is solely that of catalyst and intermediary. The interaction grows from their specific competency as artists. This means: looking at things from a different angle, insight into the course of the process, competency in dealing with creative emptiness, not being market-oriented, which makes them dig deeper into the issue, thinking out of the box. They can start a transformation process in the company by using their 'regular tools'. These tools can be a critical attitude, intuition, imagination and thinking in images, using the senses without a compulsion to rationalize or to take responsibility towards the economic context. Conversely, it also makes the artist think about 'his freedom' and obliges him to reflect upon the compelling character of time in a business environment. Artists also realize that business holds limitations. The real economy and the situation of employees, spatial and financial boundaries don't always leave a lot of scope for spontaneous creativity.
 - The company/organization is a source of inspiration **a gateway to** research, experiments in the field. In the process, the artists broaden their knowledge of a socio-economic environment. In addition to the more technical skills or competencies they acquire, they develop an attitude towards that environment.
- **For their art works:** this co-operation generates access to technology, methods, techniques, materials, resources and expertise inside the companies.
- **For society in general, the externalities:** these projects give visibility, external collaboration expertise and development of their network.

Lessons learned in Arteconomy, suggestions for SAGS :

- **The vision** of the intermediary on co-operation is very important to protect artistic freedom. Be willing to generate a safe space for criticism and interrogation about ethics while collaborating with all parts involved.
- Start projects with **motivated** people, the believers, in an organic process – the **right match** of people is very important.
- Be **concrete and tangible** for the broader audience from the start:
 - products and processes are both important but products are more concrete
 - storytelling by entrepreneur and artist of some best practices in the media
 - a roadmap for long-term implementation, that enhances the results, is necessary.
- **Education** is a decisive factor in society: being present by commissioning studies and **research**, by representation in examination juries, lectures, co-operations is essential .

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