

# Art Thinking and its role in the innovation cycle

*Authorship and liability note: this text was originally conceived by **Jurij Krpan** of Kersnikova Institute, and edited by Peter Purg of University of Nova Gorica, within the MAST project; both institutions and persons are involved parallelly in the DIVA project, thus the following text has been slightly transformed to fits the respective needs.*

In preparation for the challenge resolution process, the innovation catalyst had to acquire an in-depth understanding of the challenge and break it down in detail, on the basis of which he or she chose a team of innovators to resolve the challenge. Collaborating with a team of creators, he or she then coordinated the general ethical principles that would lead the innovation, and mapped various existing realities which directly or indirectly affect the process of resolving the challenge. The insights that the team of innovators obtained through research and preparations for the creative process were presented to the client with which a consensus was achieved regarding the general direction of resolving the challenge.

With regard to the topic that arose from the challenge, the innovation catalyst invited an artist to the team, or personally chose a selection of artworks which thematize the topics of the challenge in various ways. Regardless of whether the innovation team includes an artist or the catalyst selected a set of art projects him- or herself, the catalyst's job is to adequately introduce and explain artistic sensibility, artistic principles, methods, effects, poetics, conceptual and narrative dimensions, and all the entailing epistemological effects of artworks to the rest of the team. Often times, it is difficult to verbalize artworks because their narrative is encoded into a direct experience of the individual viewer/participant. The insights into or access to the artwork's creation process (records, indications), the background, context, as well as the artist's inner mood are most often not available – all this is (especially when it comes to intermedia works) frequently particular to a group of people and consequently even more complex! This direct experience is also conditioned by the cultural capital, educational breadth, and ability to form (or just a positive disposition towards) a complex understanding of the artwork (or its process) that the recipient of the artwork possesses (or does not possess at all) from before. Thus, the innovation catalyst's role (preferably) also includes guided visits to art events and sites, viewing artworks (exhibitions, installations) etc., by virtue of which the innovators are sensitized for the ineffable, only experienceable in works of art. This also raises the difficult question of authenticity of the experience of artworks when they are viewed in virtual environments or remotely, in case the works were originally not intended for such a viewing.



Reactions to these feelings become new grounds for understanding the poetics of artworks and the situational placement which can “transpose” innovators into an otherwise artistic imaginary universe, allowing them to see reality and its potentials in a completely different light. In this new light and a changed perspective on reality, new fundamental questions can appear (emerge), implying wholly novel answers.

In this regard, Art Thinking is, of course, not a process of creating artworks, but rather an attempt to pick up on the imaginary dimensions (visions) that arise from the very much tangible artistic creation. In order to properly detect these dimensions, the innovation catalyst must explain to the innovators on the team the author’s idiolect (the unique artistic expression of a method, ways of perceiving, compositional principles, the semantics of materiality etc.), and thus sensitize the innovators to an experiential intelligence which enables them to understand a particular work of art.

Developing an experiential, visual and poetic intelligence makes it possible to infer a position (or positions) from the artwork that allow new significations to emerge. Sometimes, only a gradual, even decelerated understanding of an artwork can lead to a comprehension of how, to make sense, we can exploit paradoxes which we would otherwise rationally brush off. The principles that are attractive to innovators are those that can be discovered through the artistic dialect, those that help capture and define a completely new topic in such a way that reflects these principles in their creative process. In this stage of the innovation process, the only rule is: there are no rules. That is, in this stage, we are left to our intuition, an unrestricted imagination process and a series of “NOs”, to which we arrived by way of analysis on one side and, on the other, by letting ourselves be receptive to an open structure of semantic elements that offer themselves as an infinite number of choices.

Asking questions using an artistic way of thinking is interesting for the process of innovation because these questions are charged with different arguments than those from our everyday life. The reasoning is populated by disparate meanings that track the very limits of sense. These meanings get their sense from the nonexistent but (in artworks) nonetheless operating comprehension (not thinking!). As such, they can represent the heart of the original, disruptive, and therefore unexpected inspiration for innovation solutions!

In academic jargon, we say that science is a production of knowing, while art is a production of meaning. In relation to both practices, engineering works to develop new products and services and can be defined as a production of value. To scientists and engineers in the team of innovators, encountering Art Thinking means encountering a different view of their work. Through Art thinking, they can get to know what their work can represent to an individual and/or society that uses the resulting products or services.

In this context, the role of the innovation catalyst is to introduce Art Thinking into the process of resolving the challenge and establish it as a mental entryway, which, later on in the innovation process, welcomes questions about originality, diversity, unexpectedness, consistency, multifacetedness, depth, and, in some cases, ethics and politics. The latter two are to be considered especially when it comes to social innovations, where questions of public space and public interests are essential for long-term solutions.

This is where the task of the innovation catalyst is the hardest, because, on the one side, he or she is responsible for the presentation of various artistic narratives offering speculative footing that allows new ideas to emerge, and, on the other, he or she must demand from innovators not to precipitate themselves to hasty findings, generalizations and flat conclusions. This is because their task is to bring the innovation team to a completely original base that will arise an ultimate question implying an ultimate answer.

Interpreting artistic ideations is far from easy, because sensing and understanding artworks cannot be simply explained or learned. As we already mentioned in the beginning, it requires a certain cultural capital that a person gradually obtains, together with an educational breadth and a set of diverse experiences of perceiving, emotional experience, thinking, discussing, critical appreciation etc. A lot of disagreements between artists, scientists and engineers can be intercepted by a well-versed innovation catalyst in collaboration with designers that use their sense of creativity and understanding of the end user to interpret artistic ideations into potentially useful scenarios, speculative products, or can even render them into palpable solutions via fast prototyping.