

DIRK DOBIÉY / THOMAS KOEPLIN

# CREATIVE COMPANY

HOW ARTFUL CREATION  
HELPS ORGANIZATIONS TO  
SURPASS THEMSELVES

A green diagonal banner with a purple geometric background. The banner contains the text 'READING GUIDE' in white, bold, uppercase letters, slanted to follow the banner's angle.

READING GUIDE

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# TESTIMONIALS

“I have been over the whole book and find it outstanding, stimulating, novel, and full of valuable insights. This will be a very important book and I am looking forward to it.”

– Edgar H. Schein, former professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, co-author with Peter A. Schein of *Humble Leadership: The power of relationships, openness, and trust* (2018)

“I am simply grateful and enthusiastic about how, with thorough research, perspective balance, and expert vision, the way is being prepared for a new awareness. I think this work is mandatory reading in all those organizations and companies that are looking for sustainability, added value, and meaning.”

– Anke Johannsen

“A great collection of the basics of artistic practice. It is neither exaggerated nor understated. A lot of ideas, contrasts, and approaches to rethink your own actions.”

– Daniel Hoernemann

“The book Creative Company provides a comprehensive and scientific overview based on existing theories, studies and findings from the areas of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and business. Furthermore, over 100 interviews with artists, entrepreneurs, and executives provide a strong connection to reality. The book is inspiring. For founders, it’s very reflective for self-analysis. For companies that are currently in the process of transformation and want to become more agile and creative, this is an absolute must read.”

– Anonymous at Amazon

# QUOTES

“Our book “Creative Company” stands both for a constantly evolving organization and for creative activity in good company.”

– Thomas Koeplin

“The ability to create is in demand everywhere. It is not about making everyone an artist in the traditional sense. Rather, it is about enabling people to develop their creativity in order to shape their world.”

– Thomas Koeplin

“The attempt to create a useful connection between artistic and economic processes is accompanied by a number of misunderstandings. The unconditional embrace of art, when it leads to the exaltation and idealization of artistic production, is as detrimental as the casual dismissal, from ignorance and inexperience, of its actual potential.”

– Dirk Dobiéy

“Nobody says that you have to bring along creativity to be creative, because it is inherent in all of us.”

– Dirk Dobiéy

“The greatest challenge is not the use of artistic ways of working, but rather allowing and handling uncertainty and unpredictability. Included here are the often countless attempts necessary to succeed; and coping with the dead ends and setbacks, with the unexpected additions, all of which are only encountered when the work is already underway.”

– Thomas Koeplin

“You can neither force nor prevent ideas, you can only allow them, encourage them. In principle, new things can arise anywhere, and this is also the more viable and natural process.”

– Thomas Koeplin

“Organizations that succeed in creating and sustaining an environment that enables and encourages artistic action, organizations that support and encourage their employees to develop an artistic attitude over time, become more innovative.”

– Dirk Dobiéy



# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What is so special about artists and why is this relevant?

Artists display a very special attitude that is also relevant in other disciplines today, and will become even more important in the future. Its essential elements are curiosity, passion, confidence, and resilience. While these properties are more often found in artists, they are by no means restricted to artists. Everyone can develop these skills, because they are present in all of us. They evolve over time through practice— regardless of whether someone paints, makes music, writes, researches, designs, builds, sells, or advises. It is true that developing software, making policy, or doing research on new materials require different technical expertise than playing in an orchestra. However, the ability to create is in demand everywhere.

Why is it important for organizations to learn from artists?

Organizations that can create and sustain an environment that enables and encourages artistic action, organizations that empower and encourage their employees to develop an artistic approach to their work, can strengthen their culture of creativity. They become more innovative and adaptable. They value variety, versatility, and the spirit of discovery as a contribution to entrepreneurial success. They strive for purpose for their employees and see themselves not as a purely economic entity, but as a

part of society. They enable autonomy by encouraging individual responsibility and providing employees free space to create. They are elastic and can adapt continuously, they are agile in all things, no matter how volatile or uncertain their environment. Organizations that want to be successful in the future will depend on people who act artistically. Organizations, to fully develop their abilities, must overcome any kind of one-sidedness. They must create an environment that enables variety, purpose, autonomy and elasticity in all areas, and ultimately allows for the coexistence of opposites.

## What is the main difference between your book and other publications about Art and Business?

One key difference is: Creative Company is not about Art at all. It is about unlocking the creative power of artistic practice and to stimulate organizational leaders to leverage its great potential. Artists use creative methods more consistently and intensively, and their experiences are more comprehensive. However, neither artists nor others create something in a single leap, but through many repetitions and iterations, which are embedded in the actual work processes. The acquisition of artistic skills can be understood not as an education curriculum, but as an enduring experiential learning journey. This journey can be experienced through various art forms, but—and this, in our view, is a crucial difference of our approach from most existing approaches—also without art.”

# ARTISTIC INTELLIGENCE

We are all aware that the world is big and doing business in it is a complicated, unpredictable and uncertain task for people and organizations. Today, companies have to be able to deal with numerous and often contradictory demands. Otherwise innovation and longevity would become increasingly difficult. In a situation where we lack certainty, it is no longer sufficient to act in a purely linear and rational fashion, to just do more of the same. The organizational structures and management styles of the past represent a risk to the enterprise and society in general. Our lives are characterized by acceleration, change, diversity and a perceived increase in uncertainty and pressure. In order to succeed, we need an enhanced skill set. We need to develop other competences: perception, reflection, playful creation and performance. These skills, as well as the ability to work with uncertainty and ambiguity, are fundamental human characteristics that cannot be digitized or automated in the foreseeable future. Without exception, these are skills that are particularly pronounced among artists.

The four main chapters of the book describe how to move from complexity to simplicity through perception, curiosity and variety; how to move from acceleration to consciousness through reflection, passion and purpose; how to move from uncertainty to certainty through play, confidence and

autonomy; and how to move from volatility to strength through performance, resilience, and elasticity.

# PERCEPTION, CURIOSITY AND VARIETY

People often respond to an increase in complexity by trying to make things easier. In doing so, they ignore the fact that while complicated situations are best met with simplicity, complex situations are better dealt with by variety. In the classic understanding of organizations, there is no room for variety, because the focus is on efficiency rather than effectiveness. If one counters complexity with variety, then true simplicity can arise because of the interaction of things that are not usually seen as compatible: hard work and serendipity, analysis and intuition. Not only do shortcuts emerge, but also previously unthinkable solutions can be discovered. Variety offers the opportunity to develop elegant, effective, useful—one might say multivalent—solutions that do not give priority to just one of many competing objectives, but are capable of accommodating multiple objectives at the same time. The artistic approach to complexity is curiosity. Artists are among the people whose curiosity is particularly pronounced. In art, curiosity is not

constrained but promoted. The artistic attitude is characterized by a curiosity that is not always efficient, but that leaves room for fortunate discoveries. This process does not provide quick answers, as one question leads to the next and thus helps to clarify things bit by bit, which takes time. It is never aimless and yet always appears excessive. Even if a specific topic is being pursued, potentially everything else is interesting, even if it is only remotely, or not at all, related. In short, artistic curiosity describes the fundamental willingness to perceive, receive, and to learn without prejudice. The result is variety— a variety of questions and answers, a variety of impressions, experiences and insights, a variety of possibilities.

## REFLECTION, PASSION AND PURPOSE

In an attempt to counter the increasing acceleration of our world, deceleration and mindfulness are considered the preferred means for restoring a sense of balance, focus, and security. However, artistic work knows another way: artists bring everything into their work—their knowledge and ability, their creativity and, above all, a passion to which they come through reflection. For the artistic person, reflection means to analyse and

abstract, to free yourself from what has been, to distance yourself from what is generally accepted, to change your own perspective, to generate ideas and to develop them in exchange with others, and through constant questioning, to make sure you're never too sure. Everything is geared towards developing focus, gaining a better understanding, committing oneself to something such that decisions are not only possible but mandatory. Artistic reflection is not limited to judgement and decision-making with regard to a single work, but is also the starting point for the mediation between work and oeuvre, value and impact, purpose and relevance, individual position and transcendence, work and life. Thus, it is the place where both purpose (the relation of work to the world) and self-knowledge (the individual's relationship to the world) are negotiated. In our organizations, the idea of a purpose that goes beyond preservation and growth, and the meaningfulness associated with it, is usually accorded little significance. Whatever one calls it—an aim, a higher goal, a vision, a core set of values, a philosophy, or simply a more or less concrete idea of the future—the challenge is to set a framework for the activities of the employees that restricts them as little as possible and yet focuses on a clear idea. Value creation on the one hand, impact and purpose on the other—what initially looks like a contradiction is not at all. In dynamic environments, although not only there, the meaningfulness of individual actions and the purpose of the organization are essential to the preservation of the organization as a whole; in business enterprises, therefore, purpose is a precondition for value creation.

# PLAY, CONFIDENCE AND FREEDOM

Many organizations try to control uncertainty and ambiguity by analysing and acquiring more information in order to plan and manage more precisely. But the larger the information base, the harder it is for us humans to evaluate it. Ultimately, this means that a firm belief in planning and control cannot be maintained any longer. If you want to put people in a position where they still make a meaningful contribution in dealing with the unplannable, there may be only one way: you have to give them more autonomy—conditions that are characteristic of the artistic approach. Artists are comfortable with contradictions, inconsistencies, discrepancies, nebulosity, in short, with uncertainty and ambiguity of any kind. This helps them not only to perceive the world as it is, but also to shape it as it should be. They engage in uncertainty on the basis of confidence, which manifests itself in various facets. First, there is trust in the unknown. They are guided by the undiscovered possibilities of human creative power more than being interested in the solution of well-defined problems. They trust in themselves, as expressed in the way they allow themselves to act, to create, and to develop things without being certain that they have the necessary skills, and without knowing what the outcome will be. This approach makes it clear that creativity and innovation are neither compatible with the drive towards efficiency nor are they attainable with a separation of operational

and strategic activities. There are many indications that there is a more appropriate way for organizations to operate even if at first glance they seem extravagant. Artists have many terms to describe what they do: experiment, design, rehearse, compose, combine and improvise are but a few. Ultimately, all these terms represent one and the same thing: play.

[www.ageofartists.org/creative-company](http://www.ageofartists.org/creative-company)