Mary Carty

ENTREPRENEUR, ARTS CONSULTANT, AUTHOR

Thank you all for having me here today, it's an honour to be here. There are two points I want to talk about that struck me from listening to all the conversations today. The first one is, where do we put cultural products and what are they? The second one is about collaboration. We've talked so much about collaboration today and I have a few ideas around that that I'd like to share.

For those of you who don't know me, I've had a very strange career path, I suppose you could say. My start-out was sculpture in Limerick and then I moved on to arts administration and was Arts Officer for Meath County Council for a few years. One day, I decided to become CEO of a tech company – that was quite a departure. I thought I would never work in the arts again because I got so involved in technology: writing spec sheets and contracts, making sure we got paid and managing multiple international projects.

So now, where we are talking about collaboration and change, we are talking about technology and we're talking about policy. Two things strike me. If we are very cautious about how we describe things and where we put things, our language around us changes. I'll give you an example. If you work in craft, and I have had the pleasure of working with lots of craft companies, craft is very much in the bag of Enterprise Ireland and your local Enterprise Offices. So how do we talk about that, what is the concept around it? The concept is to do with export and job creation. And that's fine.

If you talk about games, for example, and games business, games in Ireland is very much structured along with technology and that's okay. It's not seen as a cultural product. If you look at the development of games and of companies like Brown Bag (which won three Emmy Awards this week for Peter Rabbit) and Boulder Media and many others, they are not really talked about as a cultural product. They are talked about in terms of economics and job creation and enterprise and technology.

On the other hand – if you move to Sweden, Denmark and Norway where I have worked a lot over the last couple of years – cultural products like film, games, animation and transmedia, where you create and disseminate different cultural products using different platforms through real world engagement and technology, they are talked about as cultural products. They come from culture and they are funded as such. And that means the conversations they have with the audience are different, it means that we can have a different kind of conversation based on the fact that games and transmedia and film are cultural.

So you can understand there is a little problem here, because our understanding of cultural products and practices is siloed. If I was writing an application for funding, what would I say I do? Where would I tick the box? Many of the projects that I have worked on over the last couple of years wouldn't fit in any box. Nor should they, because the element of collaboration, problem solving, making things happen, trying something new and, believe me, failing (and failing often) could not happen.

Contribution

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Failure is very hard. Working across disciplines is very difficult. Learning to accept, to listen to and understand where different people are coming from is crucially important. If we are to make this sector more alive, to invite new voices in, to help people along, then we need to be open. We honestly do.

My second question then is, what really is the nature of our collaborations? Are we truly open to what others have to say? Are we honestly inviting people in? Or are we actually keeping them away? Be honest, it's not an easy industry to get into. And I suppose I am looking at this from the outside in and the inside out again now that I am back working with cultural institutions.

It is difficult to listen to others' voices, but it also means that we have to believe in ourselves and in our vision. We also must believe in the vision that others have for the country we want to create. We are the co-creators of what we do. None of this happens on its own. And whenever I think about culture and the arts and creative people – and I like to call people creatives because I believe we all are, inherently – it means extending the invitation, welcoming people in and listening to see what happens. That is how great things get done. And that is how we facilitate change.

So I think we have to ask ourselves the question about collaboration: do we really want to listen to the voices and the discussions and the learning that will come about from these questions. If we keep everything siloed, nothing changes. So, there is fear of change, and that it will be hard to negotiate, but that's okay. In other places and in other institutions like this and other universities everywhere in the world right now, everybody is struggling with this question. And it is those people who are open to taking on new ideas and to have conversations that will help forge a new way and a new path. We won't get it right all the time. We can't. It's difficult but it is also fun and rewarding.

Finally, the last thing I'd like to say… We need everyone. In technology, people argue all the time that we don't have enough programmers. I say we don't have enough of people thinking creatively. If we enable people to think creatively, they will solve whatever problems need to be solved. They will write the right code. And I know, I've paid for enough of it over the years!

We need everyone, we need everyone present, bringing all the skills that they can bring to this table, and others.

We have to be willing to work across disciplines, to work with each other in many different ways. The fact that I, as a sculptor, can end up working in technology is absolutely fine and more and more of this will happen. I believe more problems will be solved by creative people getting together with others from diverse disciplines. That, for me, is the future. Thank you for listening.

Mary Carty is an award winning entrepreneur with a background in the arts, education and technology. Over the past decade, she has founded and managed two successful start-up companies and been nominated for an interactive BAFTA. She has worked extensively with academia, the public and private sector and non-profits as an advisor, programme developer, speaker and lecturer. Mary is the co-founder of Outbox Incubator; the first Incubator for young women in STEM in the world. Outbox was launched in April by HRH Princess Anne in London, in partnership with WISE UK funded by the Salesforce Foundation. An invited "Dragon" at Nordic Game with investors Doug Richard, Ian Brunswick and Paul Heydon; Mary is regularly invited to write and lecture on the intersection of creativity, technology and innovation. In 2009, she was awarded a place on the first Enterprise Ireland, Internet Growth Acceleration Programme (iGap) where she was mentored by Sean Ellis, Dropbox; Oren Michels, Mashery; and Jonathan Dillon, Yahoo. Previous to her career in technology, Mary worked as County Arts Officer at Meath County Council and Arts Officer at the Millennium Court Arts Centre in Portadown, Co. Armagh as well as teaching in formal and non-formal contexts at primary, secondary and adult education.