

# **Artistic interventions in small organizations: Why do the stakeholders engage and what do they value from the experience?**

## *Preliminary findings from an evaluation of “Creative Pills” produced by Conexiones improbables 2011-2012*

Ariane Berthoin Antal, WZB<sup>1</sup>

Although the past years have seen the emergence of research findings on artistic interventions in organizations<sup>2</sup>, essentially nothing is known about how small and medium sized organizations (SMEs) can benefit from them. A first opportunity to start filling this gap came when the producer of artistic interventions in Spain, Conexiones improbables<sup>3</sup>, offered a research partner in the unit “Cultural Sources of Newness” at the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) the possibility of evaluating its projects.<sup>4</sup>

Artistic interventions can last for a few hours, days, weeks or months. In 2011 Conexiones improbables expanded its portfolio to offer short artistic interventions for SMEs in the form of “Creative Pills”, which they define as “a brief experience of impact for innovation for small companies.” Web-based surveys were designed in Spanish and Basque In order to find out what the participants

- expect from this new kind of interaction before they start the joint project, and
- what kinds of value they believe it generates after they have experienced working together,

The instrument uses a combination of open questions that allow the artists, employees, and the project managers to formulate their thoughts and feelings freely, and multiple choice questions. The research method and instrument are described in the appendix.

This report first briefly presents Creative Pills as a form of artistic intervention in organizations, then describes the research instrument and the research sample, before providing an overview over key results. The analysis focuses on responses to the multiple choice questions about what the stakeholders were thinking and feeling before engaging in the project, on what benefits they perceive resulted from the interaction, as well as how they see the role of Conexiones improbables.<sup>5</sup>

### **Creative Pills**

The Conexiones improbables team had learned from their work producing long-term (9-month) artistic interventions that small companies can only very rarely participate in the long format, because it tends to be too expensive and too time-consuming for them. An additional trigger for Conexiones improbables to expand its portfolio was the interest that the Bilbao City Council and the Irún City Council expressed in proposing “improbable connections” to

<sup>1</sup> Contact: [Ariane.Berthoin.Antal@wzb.eu](mailto:Ariane.Berthoin.Antal@wzb.eu) I am grateful to the Institute for Advanced Study Konstanz for the time and space it provided for this research April-September 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Berthoin Antal 2009, 2012; Biehl-Missal 2012; Darso 2004; Schnugg 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Conexiones improbables was created in 2010 by an organization for culture, communication and innovation (c2+i) under the leadership of Roberto Gómez de la Iglesia and Arantxa Mendiharat. See <http://www.conexionesimprobables.com>

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the WZB research unit “Cultural Sources of Newness” see <http://www.wzb.eu/en/research/society-and-economic-dynamics/cultural-sources-of-newness>, and specifically on the research there on artistic interventions in organizations: <http://www.wzb.eu/en/research/society-and-economic-dynamics/cultural-sources-of-newness/projects/artistic-interventions-in-organiza>

<sup>5</sup> The fine-grained analysis of the responses to the open questions is in preparation.

local retailers and SMEs. This funding enabled organizations to participate without having to pay for the artist and the support from Conexiones improbables themselves.

Since launching the Creative Pills in 2011, Conexiones improbables has run three sets of projects (two editions of EkintzaLab in Bilbao, and one BidasoaLab in Irún and Hondarribia), encompassing a total of 29 projects, which have involved 31 organizations (in some cases organizations joined together for a project) and 42 artists (in some cases artists came from collectives).

The Creative Pill interventions run between three and four months, during which time the artists, creators and/or social scientists that Conexiones improbables has matched with an organization meet in several half-day working sessions to “provide the participants from the organization with ideas/ suggestions/ references based on a need that has been previously defined by the company” ([www.conexionesimprobables.com](http://www.conexionesimprobables.com)). The format changed somewhat between the first edition of EkintzaLab in 2011 and the next two editions of projects in 2012 (EkintzaLab and BidasoaLab), based on the feedback from the participants and the observations of the Conexiones improbables team:

- In 2011 the EkintzaLab projects entailed 2 working sessions, each half a day, with the artist and his/her organization, and a closing session of 2 hours bringing together all the participating artists and organization to talk about the experience.
- In 2012 the projects started with a half day introductory session on the methodology of Creative Pills, then the artists and organizations scheduled two half day work sessions together, and the program closed with a 2-hour session for all participants, at which each group had 5-7 minutes to present its project.
- In all three editions of Creative Pills the participants of some projects took the initiative to organize at least one additional working session during the project life-span.

Every Creative Pill is a unique project, created between the artist(s) and the participating members of the organization, with support from the intermediary organization, Conexiones improbables. The responsibilities of the Conexiones improbables team are multiple, and include:

- Securing the funding for the Creative Pills;
- Finding (jointly with the city councils) SMEs that could be interested in participating in a round of Creative Pills in the selected city/region;
- Getting the responsible manager in the SME to define a starting point for the collaboration;
- Selecting the artist(s) for each SME;
- Organizing and facilitating a meeting with all participants to explain the process at the beginning of each round of Creative Pills;
- Following the projects in order to help in case problems arise;
- Organizing a final session with all the projects in a round at which each team explains what they did, in order to draw out conclusions and share the learning between the participants in the different projects;
- Documenting the results for the website and for the city council.

## **Overview of sample**

The organizations that participated in the three editions of Creative Pills come primarily from the retail and service sectors, but also include a few manufacturers (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Participating organizations**

<b>Edition of Creative Pills</b>	<b>Number of retail companies</b>	<b>Number of service sector companies</b>	<b>Number of manufacturing companies</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
EkintzaLab 2011	4	8	0	12 (but 10 projects because 2 projects had paired companies)
EkintzaLab 2012	0	9	0	9
BidasoaLab 2012	6	1	3	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	18	3	31

All of the organizations are very small, i.e., mostly fewer than 5 employees, and some are run by an entrepreneur without any full-time employees. Table 2 shows the distribution of participants in each edition of Creative Pills according to the three stakeholder groups: artists, project managers<sup>6</sup>, and employees. In several projects there are artists' collectives, so several artists were involved. The project managers all participated in the Creative Pills, either alone or alongside their employees. Such active participation by the project manager is not always the case in longer artistic interventions, where he or she may initiate and monitor the project, but leave the participation to employees.

**Table 2: Participants in each edition of Creative Pills**

<b>Edition of Creative Pills</b>	<b>Artists</b>	<b>Project managers</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
EkintzaLab 2011	14	11	17	42
EkintzaLab 2012	12	10	9	31
BidasoaLab 2012	16	10	17	43
<b>TOTAL</b>	42	31	43	116

As Table 3 shows, a total of 122 responses were received. Of these, 29 arrived for the combined pre-and post-experience survey sent to EkintzaLab 2011 participants (i.e. a 69% response rate); 20 (64.5% response rate) for the pre-experience survey for EkintzaLab 2012, 14 (45% response rate) for its post-experience survey; 31 (72% response rate) for the pre-experience survey for BidasoaLab participants, and 28 (65% response rate) for its post-experience survey. In other words, the overall response rate was high, although it varied between the editions (somewhat lower for EkintzaLab 2012 than the other 2 editions), and the post-experience response rate was lower than the pre-experience response rate for both EkintzaLab 2012 and BidasoaLab 2012. The response rate for employees was somewhat lower (varying between 22% and 76.5%) than for the artists (50%-100%) and managers (60%-100%).

<sup>6</sup> Conexiones improbables refers to the participating entrepreneurs and managers in Creative Pills as "responsables de proyecto", translated here as "project managers".

**Table 3: Composition of the respondent sample**

Edition of Creative Pills	Number of responses and response rate			TOTAL
	Artists	Project managers	Employees	
EkintzaLab 2011 Integrated survey pre- and post-experience	14 (100%)	9 (82%)	6 (35%)	29 (69%)
EkintzaLab 2012 Pre-experience	8 (66.5%)	8 (80%)	4 (44.5%)	20 (64.5%)
EkintzaLab 2012 Post experience	6 (50%)	6 (60%)	2 (22%)	14 (45%)
BidasoaLab 2012 Pre-experience	8 (50%)	10 (100%)	13 (76.5%)	31 (72%)
BidasoaLab 2012 Post-experience	11 (68.5%)	7 (70%)	10 (59%)	28 (65%)
TOTAL	47	40	35	122

### Preliminary findings on objectives

The surveys first sought to clarify the objectives the various stakeholders attached to their participation in the artistic intervention.<sup>7</sup> Based on our earlier research, we expect that employees, managers and artists will bring different expectations to the engagement. It is important to recognize the existence of such differences in initial expectations between (and within) stakeholder groups when undertaking an evaluation of what the participants later perceived as valuable about the process and outcomes of the experience.<sup>8</sup>

The project managers participating in EkintzaLab 2012 and BidasoaLab 2012 were asked about the objectives they had for the artistic intervention using a multiple choice format generated from responses to EkintzaLab 2011 (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Possible objectives for the company**

1. Para activar la creatividad en el equipo / Lantaldean sormena sustatzeko [To stimulate creativity in the team]
2. Para repensar el modelo organizativo / Eredu antolatzailea berriro pentsatzeko [To review the organizational model]
3. Para motivar a los/as trabajadores/as / Langileak motibatzen [To motivate employees]
4. Para repensar productos o servicios / Produktu edo zerbitzuak berriro pentsatzeko [To review current products or services]
5. Para imaginar nuevos productos o servicios / Produktu edo zerbitzu berriak irudikatzen [To imagine new products or services]
6. Para pensar nuevos canales de comunicación con los/as clientes/as o el

<sup>7</sup> Several ways of addressing this topic were used in the survey, but this report focuses on the responses to the multiple choice question.

<sup>8</sup> Another reason for eliciting expectations at the outset is to observe whether the features that the participants end up particularly appreciating are those that they expected to seek or quite different aspects of the project that they discovered along the way. Discrepancies between initial expectations and later appreciations may indicate areas in which the most learning has occurred. Analysis of the qualitative data will address these aspects.

público en general / Bezeroekin edo publikoarekin orokorrean komunikazio-bide berriak pentsatzeko [To envisage new channels of communication with customers or the general public]

7. No hay razones específicas / Ez dago arrazoi espezifikorik [There are no specific objectives]

Given the options in Table 4, the most frequent responses from the responsible project managers were:

- To think of new channels of communication with customers or the general public, and
- To stimulate creativity in the team.
- Thinking about new ways of organizing the business, taking a fresh look at products and services or generating ideas for new products and services were also objectives that were mentioned several times.

The motivation of employees was the least frequently mentioned objective. No project manager indicated that there was no specific reason for engaging in the project.

This study is the first one to give employees a voice about their expectations before entering an artistic intervention. Assuming that employees might not have the same objectives as management, they were not given the management list of objectives to choose from. Instead, the question was open, leaving them the space to formulate their own ideas.

- Most employees wrote that they hoped the intervention would bring new perspectives, new ideas, new energy.
- Several admitted that they did not know why the company was engaging in the project.

A complementary question sought to elicit the employees' attitude to the project at the outset. They were asked to indicate which had been their first thought when they had heard there would be an artistic intervention project. For this question, they were offered several possible responses to choose from (see Table 5 below), which we had elicited from research interviews in a different study (Berthoin Antal 2011) as well as the possibility of adding any other response.

**Table 5: Possible employee responses to the idea of an artistic intervention**

1. ¡Buena idea! / Ideia bikaina! [Good idea!]
2. ¡Que idea más rara! / Zein ideia arraroa! [What a strange idea!]
3. ¡Una pérdida de tiempo y de dinero! / Denbora eta diru galtzea! [A waste of time and money!]
4. Ya veremos / Ikusiko dugu [We'll see]
5. Otro, es decir / Bestelakoak [Other, namely...]

The two most common responses that the employees gave were “good idea!” and “we’ll see”. A few employees remembered having felt it was a “strange idea.” None responded that they thought it would be a waste of time and money. In other words the employees were quite open, some even enthusiastic about the innovative approach of Creative Pills. While it is important to note the uncertainty or scepticism some employees felt about the prospect of working with an artist in their organization, it is also interesting to speculate about how much anxiety the prospect of a traditional consultant entering the organization might have engendered.

## Preliminary findings on how the stakeholders value the collaboration and its outcomes

### Overall feeling

All three stakeholder groups were first asked how they had felt about the Creative Pill collaboration. They could choose up to three terms from a set of options (see Table 6).

**Table 6: How the three stakeholder groups felt the collaboration had been for them:**

1. estimulante / pizgarria [stimulating]
2. irritante / haserregarria [irritating]
3. sorprendente / harrigarria [surprising]
4. decepcionante / etsigarria [disappointing]
5. útil / baliagarria [useful]
6. irrelevante / garrantzirik gabea [irrelevant]
7. vitalizante / bizkorgarria [energizing]
8. una pérdida de tiempo /denbora galtzea [a waste of time]
9. divertido / dibertigarria [fun]
10. embarazoso / deserosoa [embarrassing]
11. inspirador / inspiragarria [inspiring]

The most frequent response from all the stakeholders was: “stimulating”. The next responses that the employees chose most often were “fun”, “useful” and “inspiring”; project managers added “energizing” and “inspiring”; and the artists emphasized “useful” especially often, then “inspiring” and “fun”. None of the stakeholders chose the response option “waste of time”. Only two respondents (project managers) felt the experience had been “disappointing”, and “irrelevant” was marked only once (by an artist).

A closer look at some of the less frequently mentioned items is useful, too. Given that people are sometimes afraid that working with the arts will reveal incompetencies or parts of themselves that they would prefer to keep private, it is relevant to note that only one project manager and one employee mentioned having felt embarrassed in some way. By contrast, it is intriguing that in all three rounds of Creative Pills, some artists noted that they had felt embarrassed—more analysis will be required to understand the nature and significance of this finding.

The fact that “irritating” was checked only once (by an artist) is also worth looking into. The term may at first glance appear negative, so its absence from the responses may seem to be a positive sign. However, the irritation of ways of thinking and doing things is a source of cultural dissonance, one of the triggers of innovation, learning and change in organizations that has been identified in previous research (e.g., Stark 2009). It is possible that respondents disliked the word, and another word (e.g., “provoked”) might be a better choice. Furthermore, it is possible that a longer intervention format is needed to trigger such learning processes and it is unrealistic to expect it of the short format of Creative Pills. This feature will require further study, probably involving interviews to complement the survey method, and comparative research with longer artistic interventions.

### Perceived extent of impacts and types of benefits

Several questions sought to find out whether the participants felt that the artistic intervention had had an impact (a) on them personally, (b) on other people in the organization, and (c) on the organization itself—and if so, (d) what kinds of benefits they had observed.

The overwhelming majority of employees and project managers responded that the collaboration with the artist had had an impact on them personally, on other people, and on the organization. Only 2 respondents reported no effect on them personally and 3 indicated that they did not think it had affected others.

In order to see what kinds of effects the respondents identified, the 2012 edition of the survey built on the responses given in 2011 to create lists of possible benefits from the Creative Pill experience. The employees and the project managers in the two editions of Creative Pills in 2012 were asked to identify which of the benefits they believed they had gained personally and which they believed the organization had gained from the experience.

Recognizing that the benefits of engaging in an artistic intervention start with the individuals who participate in it, a process that may then generate spill-over effects for the organization, the employees and project managers were asked about what benefits they felt they got from the experience personally (Table 7).

**Table 7: Possible benefits experienced by individual respondents**

- 1) No me beneficié del proyecto / Proiektuak ez dit onurarik eman [I did not benefit from the project]
- 2) Conseguí nuevas ideas / Ideia berriak lortu ditut [I got new ideas]
- 3) Conseguí más energía / Energia gehiago lortu dut [I was energized]
- 4) Conseguí nuevas perspectivas / Ikuspegi berriak lortu ditut [I gained new perspectives]
- 5) Aprendí nuevas habilidades / Trebetasun berriak ikasi ditut [I learned new skills]
- 6) Mejoré mi relación con clientes habituales o proveedores / Ohiko bezero ala hornitzaileekin harremanak hobetu ditut [I improved my relations with existing clients or suppliers]
- 7) Amplié mi red con nuevos clientes potenciales / Bezero potentzial berrien sarea handitu dut [I expanded my network with new potential clients]
- 8) Amplié mi red con nuevos proveedores potenciales / Hornitzaile potentzial berrien sarea handitu dut [I expanded my network with new potential suppliers]
- 9) Amplié mi red en la comunidad local / Tokiko komunitatean sarea handitu dut [I expanded my network in the local community]
- 10) Amplié mi red a otras partes del país / Herrialdeko beste leku batzuetara handitu dut nire sarea [I expanded my network to other parts of the country]
- 11) Amplié mi red internacionalmente / Nire sarea nazioartera handitu dut [I expanded my network internationally]
- 12) Amplié mi red a nuevos campos como: / Nire sarea alor berri hauetara handitu dut: [I expanded my network to new fields, such as...]

- The employees highlighted “more energy” and “new perspectives” particularly frequently and they appreciated having developed better relations with clients and with the local community.
- The project managers emphasized that the experience had given them “new ideas” and “new perspectives” and had expanded their contacts in the local community.

- Many respondents identified specific new skills they had learned, as well as ideas that they discovered through the collaboration. The most frequently mentioned skills related to learning how to use different communication and presentation media and how to connect with social networks; several wrote that they had gained confidence in their abilities at work.

The questionnaire offered a list of organizational-level benefits for the respondents to choose from, add to, and illustrate (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Possible benefits gained by the organization**

1) No lo sé / Ez dakit [I don't know]
2) No creo que la organización se beneficiase de la participación / Ez dut uste erakundeak onurarik atera duenik [I don't think that the organization benefited from participating]
3) Se desarrollaron nuevas ideas para productos / Produktuentzat ideia berriak garatu ziren [New ideas for products were developed]
4) Se desarrollaron nuevas ideas para servicios / Zerbitzuentzat ideia berriak garatu ziren [New ideas for services were developed]
5) Se desarrollaron nuevas ideas para procesos / Prozesuentzat ideia berriak garatu ziren [New ideas for processes were developed]
6) Se hicieron nuevos prototipos / Prototipo berriak egin ziren [New prototypes were developed]
7) Se desarrollaron nuevas maneras de ver las cosas / Gauzak ikusteko modu berriak garatu ziren [New ways of seeing things were developed]
8) Se desarrollaron nuevas metodologías / Metodologia berriak garatu ziren [New ways of doing things were developed]
9) Se desarrollaron nuevos conceptos / Kontzeptu berriak garatu ziren [New concepts were developed]
10) Desarrollo de nuevos contactos / Kontaktu berriak garatu ziren [New contacts were developed]
11) Visibilidad en los medios de comunicación / Komunikabideetan ikuspena eman zion [Increased visibility in the media]

Given these items, those most commonly identified by the employees were:

- New ways of seeing things and
- Increased visibility in the media.

The employees also mentioned new methods and new ideas for products and services.

- Only 2 employees responded they did not know what benefits the organization had from the experience and
- None indicated that they felt there had been no benefits to the organization.

The project managers also most frequently identified:

- Increased visibility in the media,
- New ideas for products and services and
- New ways of seeing things.

Among the benefits to the organization that the respondents specified in their own words are:

- “Nos ha ayudado a centrarnos” [It helped to center us] (Employee, EkintzaLab 2012)

- “ke nos sirvió para analizarnos y se dijeron muchas cosas en las reuniones” [it helped to analyse us and many things were said in the meetings] (Employee, BidasoaLab 2012)
- “El hecho de haber decidido enfrentarnos a las preguntas incómodas.” [The fact of having decided to confront uncomfortable questions] (Project manager, EkintzaLab 2012)
- “El poder realizar actuaciones que nunca se me hubiesen ocurrido realizar” [The ability to achieve things that I would never have thought of doing] (Project manager, BidasoaLab 2012)

Since artistic interventions are quite a new field of activity for artists, little is known about what they feel is valuable in these interactions. It is important that the artists also experience benefits in the projects because without their sincere engagement, it is unlikely that the participants from the organization will get much value out of the interaction (Berthoin Antal 2009). The survey provided space for the artists to explain what they had valued and they reported a variety of points. A few examples are:

- “Haber podido inventar y probar métodos relacionados con las dinámicas grupales en un caso real.” [To have been able to invent and try out methods relating to group dynamics in a real case.] (Artist, BidasoaLab 2012)
- “Comprobar que mi visión alternativa es válida para su negocio y conocer otros casos de colaboraciones entre artistas y empresas, sus éxitos y teóricos fracasos.” (Artist, EkintzaLab 2012) [Discovering that my alternative vision is valid for the organization’s business and getting to know other cases of collaboration between artists and companies, their successes and their theoretical failures.]
- “Contrastar realidades y formas de afrontarlas. Conocer una empresa que me llamaba la atención y que ahora me gusta más (con más conocimiento de causa).” [Contrasting realities and ways of dealing with them. Getting to know a company that was calling my attention and that I now like more, with a better knowledge of it] (Artist, EkintzaLab 2012)

#### Should others try it?

One way of getting the respondents to summarize their evaluation of the experience was to ask them whether they would recommend such a collaboration to others, based on this experience with a Creative pill, and if so why; if not, why not; and if “maybe”, under what conditions they would recommend it. It is significant that every single participant in all three groups of all three editions of Creative Pills said “yes” they would recommend it.

The questionnaire gave them the space to explain their reason for this recommendation. A few examples are:

- “Porque nuestro sector está en crisis y esto nos da nuevas energías” [Because our sector is in crisis and this gives us new energy] (Employee, EkintzaLab 2011)
- “Por el probable impacto de exponerte a las propuestas de personas ajenas a tu día a día.” [For the probable impact of exposing yourself to the ideas of people who are far from your daily context] (Employee BidasoaLab 2012)
- “Por el análisis que se hace desde la empresa para explicarle a alguien ajeno a la organización todo y en ese aspecto es cuando se dan los cambios.” [For analysing the company and explaining it to someone outside the organization, this is when the changes happen] (Employee EkintzaLab 2012)
- “Porque el resultado ha sido muy positivo ayudándonos a cimentar un par de ideas y proyectos que teníamos pendientes por ahí.” [Because the result was very positive, helping us to advance a few ideas and projects that we had had pending until then] (Project manager EkintzaLab 2011)
- “Porque supone una oportunidad para conocer nuevas ideas, metodologías de trabajo, y reflexionar sobre cómo trabaja la empresa, qué está haciendo bien y mal.” [Because it offers an opportunity to get to know new ideas, ways of working, and to

reflect on how the company is doing, what it is doing well or badly.] (Project manager EkintzaLab 2012)

- “Es una dinámica colaborativa que potencia las capacidades de ambos agentes (artista y pyme) sin necesidad de acordar de forma previa ni acotar cuáles son los roles que juega cada uno dentro del proyecto. Esos acuerdos/simbiosis/sinergias surgen del propio proceso de negociación. Por tanto el proceso se convierte en aprendizaje y en reto para ambos.”[It is a collaborative dynamic that strengthens the capabilities of both parties (artist and SME) without needing to agree on the form in advance nor specify the roles that each one plays in the projects. These agreements/symbiosis/ synergies emerge from the process of negotiation itself. Thereby the process becomes a learning process and a success for both.] (Artist BidasoaLab 2012)
- “Es un espacio nuevo, encontrarte dentro de un contexto empresarial es estimulante... te hace recapacitar sobre tus funciones, metodología y objetivos.” [It is a new space, being in a business context is stimulating ... makes you reconsider your functions, methods and objectives.] (Artist, EkintzaLab 2012)

Some artists added qualifiers to their recommendation. For example, one pointed out that this kind of interaction is not suited to artists who have no interest in relational processes, or who consider working with organizations to be an encroachment on the autonomy of the arts. Another artist noted that the values of the organization are an important factor in enabling collaboration with artists. These points confirm past research findings (Berthoin Antal 2012; Darsø 2004) and highlight the importance of the intermediary role in selecting artists and matching them with the organization, which is the dimension addressed in the last section of the survey.

### **Preliminary findings on the role of the Conexiones improbables team**

Small and medium sized companies and artists belong to different worlds, so they need an intermediary who can not only bring them together at the outset but who has the knowledge and skill to support the entire process. An additional significant factor in these cases is the ability and credibility of the intermediary to inspire policy makers to invest in the project. Producing artistic interventions is a new kind of activity, entailing a multitude of responsibilities, and requiring flexibility and the ability to learn from each set of project experiences in order to keep improving<sup>9</sup>. In keeping with the spirit of learning from experience, the Conexiones improbables team made some changes in the Creative Pill process support in 2012. They added an introductory session with all the participants and scheduled time in the final session for all the participants to talk about their results.

The 2012 surveys included questions focusing on the role of Conexiones improbables in order to discover what the project managers and the artists found most helpful and what kinds of further improvements they suggest for future rounds. Overall, the respondents were satisfied with the support from Conexiones improbables, some were even delighted, and only two managers indicated that they were disappointed. In response to the open question about which aspects in particular they appreciated:

- Several project managers wrote “everything”, so it appears all the phases of the support are important to them.
- Beyond the actual tasks fulfilled by Conexiones improbables, the project managers valued the spirit: the enthusiasm shown by Conexiones improbables and the help in overcoming doubts.

---

<sup>9</sup> See Berthoin Antal in collaboration with R. Gómez de la Iglesia and M. Vives Almadóz 2011 for a comprehensive review of the roles of intermediaries and their development in Europe. Also Berthoin Antal 2012.

- The artists, too, indicated that the help provided in all the phases of the project was important.

The most frequently mentioned type of recommendation from the participants for future rounds would be to manage expectations better in advance of the interaction. Two aspects were raised here. First, communicating to the organization that artists who enter into an artistic intervention in an organization are not “just another consultant” paid to provide answers and deliver a specific result as efficiently as possible, but rather a source of questioning, opening up space and trying out possibilities. The second aspect of managing expectations entails emphasizing to all the participants that getting something out of the experience means really engaging in the process. A question that arises from this analysis is whether there is a drawback to fully-externally funded projects. Might having to pay at least a part of the cost of the artistic intervention be necessary to increase the project managers’ and their employees’ commitment to engaging in the process?

The role of the intermediary is very significant, but of course the responsibility for getting the most out of the artistic intervention lies primarily with the members of the organization and the artists. All three types of respondents were therefore also asked in the survey to consider whether the organization and/or the artist could have done more/should do something differently next time to make the project more valuable. Quite a variety of suggestions appear in the responses, indicating that each actor engaged in some (self-)reflection. The most common concern they addressed was the need to invest more time on the project together.

### **Conclusions**

The preliminary analysis of part of the data generated by the web-based surveys of Creative Pills 2011-2012 permit the formulation of two kinds of general conclusions. First, about the value of these kinds of artistic interventions, and second about the use (and limitations) of the research instrument. These conclusions also serve to outline the direction for further analysis of the qualitative survey data and of additional visual materials about the projects that Conexiones improbables has posted on the website.

The current economic crisis in Spain is creating pressures on companies of all sizes, and many SMEs are experiencing existential concerns. So the idea of investing time and money (in the case of Creative Pills: public funds) to work with the arts may at first glance seem superfluous. However, as the project managers indicate in the surveys, such difficult times require new thinking and new energies —and these are among the most frequently mentioned benefits that project managers and employees drew from the collaboration with the artists in Creative Pills. The responses to the survey suggest that these two kinds of resources generated in the interactions with the artists (and sometimes also with the intermediary from Conexiones improbables) stimulate the respondents to overcome doubts about their ability to innovate and deal actively and creatively with the challenges they face, individually and collectively.

Another striking finding of this preliminary evaluation was the frequency with which the respondents mentioned expanding their contacts into the local community. This finding confirms that the benefits from the artistic interventions may well spill over beyond the boundaries of the organization (Berthoin Antal 2009; Schiuma 2011).

Considering that the Creative pills format entails just three half-day work sessions over the course of three months, these are considerable achievements. It is of course likely that the energy sparked during these artistic interventions will dwindle over time. They could be rekindled through fresh interactions, such as alumni sessions for participants in past projects and joint activities with the artists and organizations in new editions of Creative Pills.

The study also permits some conclusions to be drawn about the usefulness of web-based questionnaires as a qualitative research tool: It offers several advantages over the face-to-face interview:

- The respondents can choose any time of day or night to respond, so it is less disruptive than interviews.
- The responses are returned to the survey site, providing the participants with the freedom to express themselves quasi-anonymously (the site does not register names or email addresses). The respondents know that their responses are seen only by the researcher, who does not attribute the comment directly to a recognizable individual respondent in the analysis.
- The predominance of open questions in this particular research instrument and the choice of language allow the respondents to formulate their thoughts and feelings in their own words.
- The responses do not require time-consuming transcription, as is the case in interview-based data collection, so they are immediately available for analysis.
- It is easier to include a far greater number of cases and participants than in interview and observation-based research, and to collect their views at several points in time (e.g., pre- and post- experience perspectives), thereby enabling comparative research within and between projects.
- The high response rate among all three stakeholder groups in this study shows the willingness of different kinds of respondents to use the research tool provided to them as a means of sharing their thoughts and feelings about the artistic intervention.
- The richness of the data collected confirms the value of this kind of instrument.

Of course such an instrument has its drawbacks for research as well. As is true for any written survey, the lack of personal interaction between researcher and respondent is a barrier to probing deeper into the experience and the meaning the respondents attach to it. The respondents have the option of contacting the researcher directly (an option one project manager did in fact use), but not vice versa in the current format, so ways to enable the dialogue to be extended may be added in future revisions of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the written response format also precludes the possibility of observing bodily expressions (e.g., of energy, enthusiasm, irritation, reticence) that enrich face-to-face research interviews.

Fortunately, however, there is visual material from the projects on the Conexiones improbables website ([www.conexionesimprobables.com](http://www.conexionesimprobables.com)). The images and mini-films generated during and after the projects capture complementary aspects of the experience that the written survey format is not equipped to access. These materials can be mined in order to deepen the understanding of what actually happens in artistic interventions in organizations and how these activities generate value, for example by observing people's gestures and physical interactions to see what they reveal about the creation of relational space in the collective learning processes (Berthoin Antal & Friedman, forthcoming) and emotional energy as a resource for action (Collins, 1993). The visual material can also be examined to discover the roles that artefacts may be playing in the communication and collaboration between the artists, project managers and employees (Nicolini, Mengis & Swan 2011).

#### **References:**

- Berthoin Antal, Ariane (2009). *Research report: Research framework for evaluating the effects of artistic interventions in organizations*. Gothenburg: TILLT Europe.
- Berthoin Antal, Ariane (2011). *Manifeste, corporel et imprévisible: l'apprentissage organisationnel de la Résidence d'artistes*. *La Résidence d'artistes Eurogroup Consulting*, Catalogue 5, Puteaux.
- Berthoin Antal, Ariane in collaboration with R. Gómez de la Iglesia and M. Vives Almandoz (2011). *Managing artistic interventions in organisations. A comparative study of*

- programmes in Europe*, 2nd edition, updated and expanded. Gothenburg: TILLT Europe, 168 p.
- Berthoin Antal, Ariane (2012). Artistic intervention residencies and their intermediaries: A comparative analysis. *Organizational Aesthetics* 1/1 44-67.
- Berthoin Antal, Ariane & Friedman, Victor (forthcoming). So what do you do? Experimenting with space for social creativity. In: P. Meusbürger, B. Werlen (eds.) *Knowledge and Action* (working title). Series Knowledge and Space. Vol. 9. Dordrecht, Springer Verlag.
- Biehl-Missal, B. (2011). *Wirtschaftsästhetik. Wie Unternehmen die Kunst als Inspiration und Werkzeug nutzen* [Business aesthetics: How organizations use art as inspiration and tool]. Wiesbaden: Gabler Verlag.
- Collins, Randall (1993). Emotional energy as the common denominator of rational action. *Rationality and Society*. 5/2:203-230.
- Darsø, L. (2004). *Artful creation. Learning-tales of arts-in-business*. Frederiksberg, DK: Samfundslitteratur.
- Nicolini, Davide, Mengis, Jeanne & Swan, Jacky (2011), Understanding the role of objects in cross-disciplinary collaboration. *Organization Science*. Articles in Advance, pp. 1–18, ©2011 INFORMS. doi 10.1287/orsc.1110.0664
- Schiama, Giovanni (2011). *The value of arts for business*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stark, David (2009). *The sense of dissonance. Accounts of worth in economic life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

## Appendix: Research instrument

The newness of this field requires a research method that elicits the perceptions of the participants and enables them to explain what it means to them. The usual approach to obtain such data would be to conduct semi-structured interviews and to observe the interactions on site, neither of which was feasible for this project. Instead, the researcher decided to use an alternative method of data collection that would allow the participants to express themselves at their convenience, namely web-based questionnaires. A set of web-based questionnaires was designed with a mix of open questions and some multiple-choice questions to collect pre- and post-experience perspectives.

There are three versions of the survey: one for the responsible project managers in the SMEs, one for the employees, and one for the artists. Some questions appear in all three versions so that comparisons can be made between the responses from the stakeholders. The questions in every survey are formulated in Spanish and Basque because the Creative Pills are offered in the Basque region.

In the first survey for EkintzaLab 2011 most of the questions were open (i.e., providing space for respondents to type in their thoughts). From those answers it was possible to re-formulate some questions in 2012 as multiple choice in order to simplify the response process for the respondents, while still providing space for them to add more text if they wanted to. The version for the artists, however, remains predominantly open questions because their answers to the earlier surveys were much longer and more differentiated than those of the other respondents, thereby not only making it technically much more difficult to reduce them to multiple choice format, but also indicating that such a restriction on their scope of expression in the survey would impoverish the results.<sup>10</sup>

The link to the survey was sent to the respondents by Conexiones improbables, and the responses were received only by the researcher via the survey website. This mode of communication assures the respondents of quasi-anonymity: Conexiones improbables does not have direct access to the responses, and the researcher does not have the respondents' names and addresses.<sup>11</sup> Due to project timing, the participants in EkintzaLab 2011 received the survey after the projects had been completed, so their version of the questionnaire had two parts: one

<sup>10</sup> Given that almost all the questions to the artists were open questions and they responded quite extensively, this preliminary report is not yet able to do justice to their input.

with pre-experience questions, for which they were asked to try to remember what they had thought and felt before the experience; then the second part of the questionnaire contained questions focused on the period during and after the project. For EkintzaLab 2012 and BidasoaLab 2012 the participants were surveyed twice, once before they started the project and again a couple of months later, after they had had time to digest the experience.

In addition to the questionnaires for the managers, artists and employees, a questionnaire was prepared for the Conexiones improbables team members so that their perspective as producers of the artistic interventions could be included as well. The questions in that survey seek to elicit information about the rationale, the design, and the production of the Creative Pills, including changes and learning from the experiences over the two-year period 2011-2012.

---

<sup>11</sup> The survey is quasi-anonymous because last question of every questionnaire asks the respondents to specify the name of the organization of their Creative Pill, so that the researcher can look at all the responses to any given project from the perspective the artist, the project manager and the employees.