

# Artists as Public Sector Intrapreneurs: An Experiment

Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation Lab

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# ARTISTS AS PUBLIC SECTOR INTRAPRENEURS

## Abstract

Public organizations need to approach increasingly ambiguous and complex problems through the creative problem solving and innovative solutions offered by intrapreneurs. Some public agencies have implemented artist residency programs to allow for fresh perspectives and novel insights to be incorporated into existing projects. This study examined the intrapreneurial possibilities of artists in the public sector by first comparing the personality traits of artists and public sector workers, and then examining the impacts of an artist's presence for solving complex problems. The results of this experiment indicate that artists introduce intrapreneurial characteristics such as openness and divergent thinking, and that groups of public sector workers who are in collaboration with artists may develop more creative solutions than groups without.

## Introduction

Public sector agencies face complex and rapidly changing environments in a manner like that of the private sector, but often lack the same flexibility to embrace risk to respond comprehensively. Artist residency programs in unconventional environments, such as public agencies, emerged in the 1960s. Some organizations pursue residencies to address new types of problems creatively and in an innovative manner. Currently, relatively few analyses of the efficacy of these programs exist, and those that do focus on external perceptions of program outcomes by stakeholders rather than direct causal links to innovation during residencies. This novel experiment suggests that artist

residency programs can introduce intrapreneurial openness and creativity to public sector work environments.

## Theory and Hypothesis

Artists share characteristics with intrapreneurs as defined in the literature, including but not limited to extraversion, openness, and creativity. To understand the impact of intrapreneurship in group problem solving, it must be established that artists act as intrapreneurs.

*Hypothesis 1: Artists in the sample exhibit intrapreneurial traits.*

Assuming artists can be defined as intrapreneurs, there also needs to be established links between intrapreneurial behavior and innovation in public sector environments. Research on creativity in group problem-solving shows diversity of thought and experience can lead to introduction of conflict and elaboration. Prior evaluations also indicate that stakeholders perceive positive contributions by artist residents to organizational outcomes, including creativity.

*Hypothesis 2: Intrapreneurial artists enhance organization innovativeness.*

## Methods

The hypotheses were tested through a lab experiment featuring 18 groups of public-sector employees: 10 groups were assigned artists and the other 8 served as controls. The experiment started with the administration of personality tests and divergent thinking tasks to all subjects followed by a novel and ambiguous problem to

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solve in a group setting with other subjects. The sessions were videotaped and analyzed for artists' contributions both by noting instances of conflict and elaboration. The groups' written solutions were rated by experts in local government.

## Results

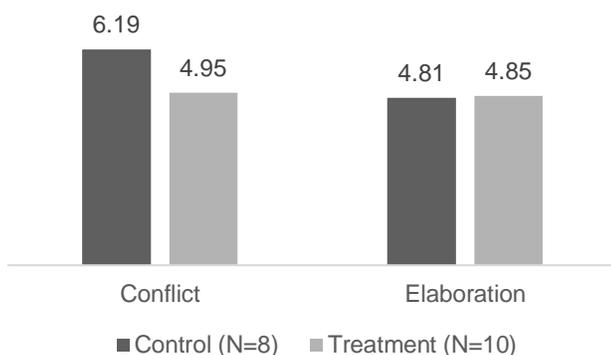
The research findings support the hypothesis that artists serve as public sector intrapreneurs. With regards to the first hypothesis, artists were not significantly more extroverted than the public sector workers but did score higher on openness. Artists also demonstrated higher scores on divergent thinking tasks, with more originality in responses as well as more ideas proposed. With respect to the group-level hypotheses, groups with and without artists differed in the nature of the problem-solving processes and the creativity of the solutions they proposed, though the differences were not statistically significant given the small sample size. Specifically, groups with artists had less task conflict, contrary to expectations. In line

with expectations, artists' groups had higher scores for creativity and novelty, though the public-sector groups scored more highly for idea usefulness. These results offer insight for future research to recreate these differences with a larger sample size and more firmly indicate differences between artist and public sector worker contributions to group problem solving.

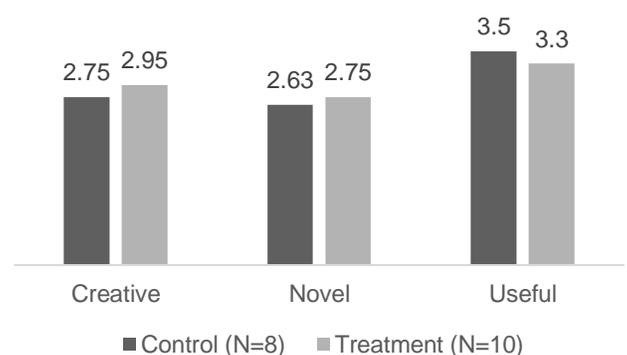
## Conclusion

This study is the first to examine outcomes of artist residencies in creatively solving complex problems. Residency programs can benefit both the artists and the public sector through the creativity of intrapreneurial artists. While the specialized knowledge of public sector employees is still important for effective implementation of new ideas, the expanding popularity of artist residency programs indicates the exciting potential for artists to bring openness, new ideas and innovation to complex public problems.

**Fig 2** Average Conflict and Elaboration Ratings for Control and Treatment Groups



**Fig 3** Average Creativity, Novelty, and Usefulness Ratings for Solutions of Control and Treatment Groups



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