

Artworlds

Artworlds is a process that was designed originally for use in relation to the strategic identity instrument Stellar® (see www.stellar.eu). It also has very many powerful applications in all sorts of other areas, and has been described as the ultimate brainstorming-scenario-visualisation process. Although the following description relates specifically to the use of Artworlds in relation to Stellar®, it can easily be adapted to any other application.

Artworlds is profoundly experiential. In the context of Stellar® it is primarily designed to afford the experience of the Brand Essence of a company, department, brand or product, and to lead on to an accurate definition of it within only two or three words. It can be particularly valuable for Board members in their original identification of their company Brand Essence, but it is also valuable for all other levels within the company as they seek to identify their own properly aligned 'local' Brand Essences that are most applicable to their own department, brand or product.

The two or three words defining the Brand Essence should be the touchstone of the CEO's work – if a policy, project or programme is not producing Brand Essence, then it should be changed. It is the criterion by which everything in the company should be (internally) judged. Given this, it is clear that experiencing, understanding and defining Brand Essence accurately is of considerable importance both to the company's leaders and to all of the company's employees.

The Artworlds process presumes that participants have already engaged in other processes exploring identity, uniqueness and the nature of experiential qualitative value, and that they are now ready to identify the essence of what they uniquely bring into the world as a group.

The fundamental question that the process seeks to answer is 'what unique value does the customer experience in your product'. The ultimate aim is to describe this experience in only two words, maybe three, that ideally have a poetic or figurative quality to them, and that convincingly encapsulate the Brand Essence. It is usually not a direct description of product qualities, nor is it a directly comparable simile. It is a description of experience as a creative connection of qualities.

A basic principle of the process is that the image drawn, and the images that emerge from that image, are all driven and identified by the participants themselves – they own the outcome. The following process is not to be followed slavishly, draw from it (or add to it), whatever works, but try to follow the basic principles outlined.

The Artworlds process is twofold –

1. picture-making – making a picture of the brand essence
2. exploring – exploring the world depicted in the picture

1. Picture-making

Duration: 45 mins

Equipment: Ideally a 1-metre disc covered with black pastel paper, high quality pastels, wipes, tissues, fixative.

Objective: To zone in on, and then to draw, the brand essence of the company.

Process: One facilitator is required. Group participants, of three to eight at a time, are invited to collaborate on a single group picture-making of the company's Brand Essence. The picture-making process is very briefly outlined to participants.

The picture-making process is fourfold, all of it being notably quiet, introspective and contemplative –

- 1 the ground rules of drawing the picture are given first
- 2 followed by a process that helps participants to shift conceptually away from their generic work, zoning in on the essence of the experiential added value that they as a group uniquely bring into the world through their work
- 3 followed by a process anchoring this zoning in its historical stream
- 4 followed by the picture-making itself

1 The ground rules for making the picture

The ground rules are explained to participants. The rules are strictly –

- the picture is to be of the company's essential uniqueness, the unique qualitative value that the company brings into the world
- the disc is laid out flat, either on the floor or on a table
- groups of three to eight are ideal, although any number can participate
- no drawing skills are required, in fact it may even be an advantage to have none
- the picture will be *only* abstract, with no obviously recognizable images, words, numbers or symbols
- remember that the pastels can articulate movement, shape, form, colour, and line
- high quality pastels are fragile and messy - don't press too hard, wipes and tissues are available
- work across the whole paper, from any direction, there is no top or bottom
- you are encouraged to move around the work-surface.
- discussion of the picture-making is not allowed, which is to be done jointly in silence, with no nods, winks or collusion, and there is no 'official line'
- there is a choice of (ideally) 72 colours, and you are asked to think carefully before choosing a colour, indeed allow a colour to 'choose' you, obeying your feelings and intuition – 'which colour is it right for me to bring to this picture?'
- before each mark, stop and feel what kind of mark is calling out to be made by you

- you are expected to depict your own understanding of the company's uniqueness, while remaining aware of and respecting the marks being made by your collaborators, and of the effect of those marks on the whole
- marks can be made over marks made by others in the group, but only if it seems appropriate, and only positively (never destructively)
- it is truly a joint picture-making, and is not to be self-allocated as 'segments' either in respect of time (it's my turn now), space (I'll draw this bit) or colour (I'll do red)
- bear in mind that the finished drawing will not be interpreted in respect of what parts represent what, of its symbolism, referents, stories or 'meaning'
- don't intellectualise or rationalise, and trust the intuition
- there is no 'right' or 'wrong' – everything is right
- you have as much time as you need

2 Zoning in

The aim is to shift participants from their usual self-perception as producers of the generic, to an introspective self-recognition as producers of unique added value, with a considerable degree of insight into what that value is. This is an extremely important discussion process conducted with participants sitting comfortably.

The ground rules for this process are –

- start with a brief agreed definition of the generic product and of the qualitative value carried by it, and then move towards a deeper understanding of the value unique to it
- the purpose is to relax participants and gently get into the emotional and mental 'zone' of the brand essence, not to find a final definition
- questions should not lead or suggest
- never ask a question that has yes/no as an answer
- don't allow others to be judgmental, always respect an answer
- after an answer, it is useful to repeat that answer supportively
- questions are as a rule asked in deeper elaboration of the previous answer
- questions are always looking for intention
- allow plenty of time, mood and feeling is more important than detail
- try to involve all participants

The questions are along the lines of –

- what do you do?
- what do you specifically do in that?
- *this question can be successively asked, probing further*
- what is it that attracts you to that?
- what is it about you that makes you particularly good at that?
- *this question can be successively asked, probing further*
- what makes customers choose you above others?
- what is it about you that enables you to do this?
- *this question can be successively asked, probing further*
- what does that give them?

alternative lines of questions are –

- what would it be like if you brought something unique into the world?
- what would you be doing to achieve that?
- what is it within that which you do particularly well?
- what is it about you that makes your product the way it is?
- what quality in this product is uniquely yours?
- what is different in this product to those products of your competitors?

or –

- looking at all of your experience within the company, can you recall an instance when you felt that the company's supply of customer value was at its best, and when you felt really proud to be a part of it?
tell the story – what happened? who was involved? what made it special? what did it feel like? what was said about it? what made it possible?
- what within your work most helps you to contribute to the company's successful supply of customer value?
- what three things would you wish for that would enhance your company's supply of customer value?

or –

From an initial description of the company's core business as qualitative value X, participants are asked a succession of questions of 'why?'

- 'why do you excel at understanding qualitative value X?'

to be answered as

- 'because we excel at understanding qualitative value Y'

to be followed by

- 'why do you excel at understanding qualitative value Y?'

to be answered as

- 'because we excel at understanding qualitative value Z'

and so on

These sorts of questions can be continued until it is clear that participants are deeply immersed in their perception of the unique added value that their work creates, and have a clear feeling of what zone it is in without yet being able to define it precisely.

3 Anchoring in the historical stream

This is a threefold guided process with definite rules, and which ends with the invitation to draw the picture. Remember that you are supporting not leading, allow space and time. The process takes the form of leading participants through a kind of guided contemplation. The words written below in bold are crucial, the rest is for you to play with and make your own. Adapt the words to the particular circumstances, but do try to follow the structure and meaning. It is not enough just to speak the bold text.

Participants will either be sitting on the floor around the disc, or standing around it if it is on a table.

Remind participants that the essence of our work is never entirely original, that there are always others who have contributed to its context and history, and that it can be helpful to remind ourselves of our roots. This process is designed to relate the essential value that was explored in the previous process to its historical stream.

The three steps of the process are –

- Acknowledge those who came before

“As you are sitting on the floor, and you can feel it underneath you, you may like to close your eyes or not, so that you can imagine or think about those who enable you to be here today, those who before you brought what you bring – whether you know them or not, be they relatives or ancestors, friends or strangers, dead or alive, of this time and place or of other times and other places, individuals, communities or organisations, whoever they may be, you can allow them to be here now, behind you.”

- Feel them behind you

“Feel how it is to have them behind you. Maybe you notice a difference, maybe you want to turn around and look at them. If it feels appropriate, honour and thank them.”

- Know what that means, and prepare to draw it

“Perhaps as you look at them, they too are looking back at you. And as they are looking at you, they may be able to see in you the fruit and continuation of what they have been able to bring into the world. And as they recognise this you too might recognise it – and in recognising this know what you know, and know that only you can bring this out into the world. And with this knowledge you can now begin to draw what you alone bring into the world.”

4 Picture-making

Without any further comments from either the facilitator or participants, and following the ground rules above, participants draw their picture.

2. Exploration

Duration: 60 minutes

Equipment: The picture

Objective: To explore the full content, experience and implications of the essence depicted within the picture.

Process: One facilitator is required. Without a break and immediately after completion of the picture, the participants are invited to sit in front of the picture, with the intention of ‘entering’ into it as a ‘world’.

The idea behind this Exploration process is that the participants imagine that the disc-picture is another world, similar to Earth in almost every way. The fundamental natural laws and principles of this world, however, are significantly different, resulting in structural behaviours and values that are unique but also completely coherent and cohesive (and specific to the brand essence that has been drawn). The ground rule of this facilitator-lead process is that participants define content at all times, and the facilitator only leads the group or individual on from one simple scenario into another. The scenarios can be of any generic situation that is likely to produce interesting information, but it is important not to lead participants into a detailed non-generic scenario that is actually determined by the facilitator's imagination rather than that of the participants.

The picture is placed upright before the participants, with the disc oriented 'top and bottom' to their choice.

They are then told -

"The scenario is you are on a spaceship in a far-off galaxy, on a fact-finding tour of other worlds, and coming into land on the world depicted in this picture. This world is self-contained and complete, it is a logical and clearly structured whole. It is almost identical to Earth both physically, geographically and technologically (they have trees like ours, dogs, cars and televisions, and they even speak English!) except for the fact that its intrinsic quality, its most fundamental natural laws, properties and principles, are all totally of the core quality of the picture, present throughout every part of its fabric both micro- and macro-cosmically.

"Once we land, you will be invited to enter this world, and you will be asked a series of questions about it as you move through it. Bear in mind that all answers are right, none are wrong. I as your companion will stay outside of this world throughout.

"As we come in to land, you can see countryside as you look out of the window. We come to a halt, and you have your first real experience of this world as you disembark into the open air."

Within such a world, the facilitator's questions of the participants begin from the general (what is the air/grass like, what is the countryside like, what are the shops like, what do they sell/do you buy anything?) moving on to the particular (how are children educated, what is the food like, what sort of crime exists here?) and then eventually to the quite specific, describing one or two companies within this world (what is their reception like, what is their marketing like, how are companies financed here?).

It normally takes at least thirty minutes to begin to reach a real depth of recognition and understanding of how the depicted world is. Once a clearer and more refined and detailed familiarity with the core nature of this world has developed, the facilitator can lead the participants into the most crucial stage of the process. They are told, for example.....

"This world has a strong agricultural and industrial base, and it trades successfully with other local worlds, all of whom highly value this world's

unique products. What uniquely differentiates the products of this world from those of other worlds? What is so attractive and unique about this world's products? What is their unique quality?"

At this point the facilitator must push and dig quite persistently for detailed precision, maybe even helping to find the words that best define what is truly unique to this world – it will be subtle and difficult to define, but with determined questioning a consensus will almost certainly eventually emerge. Leading suggestions should be kept to a minimum, and posed in terms of 'is this what you mean?' Remember that the fundamental question that the process seeks to answer is 'what added value does the customer experience in your product?', or more simply 'what is your brand essence?'. The aim is for participants to describe as accurately as possible the unique core qualitative value of the depicted world in ordinary language, in a singular and coherent phrase of between three and six words (that is, not a mere listing of various characteristics), ideally with a poetic or figurative quality to them. It is usually not a direct description of product qualities, nor is it a directly comparable simile. It is a description of experience as a creative connection of qualities. And of course this comprises the participants' new definition of their company's brand essence.

(If desired, this new understanding of the company's brand essence can then be further developed into an exploration of an exemplary company within this other depicted world that is identical to the participants' own company, examining whatever is of interest to them within the perspective of its core essential quality and nature. Even more potently and accurately, participants can make a new picture specifically of the defined brand essence, and then explore that.)

The tour is then brought to a close as the tourists are called back to their spacecraft. Once airborne, they can be invited to look down at this world from the stratosphere and asked their feelings about it, what it means to them and to their fellow-passengers, and what understanding of it they are taking away with them.

Artworlds notes:

Questions are best phrased in terms of 'You walk into one of the shops – what is it like?', with 'you' being singular, even though the group is being addressed as a whole. The point is that each individual must be exploring the world on his or her own, as an observant tourist completely absorbed within this self-contained world. The conscious presence of fellow-tourists in this world will give a powerful reference pointing back to Earth, and this will help to break the simulation. Questions are not in any way leading, but the facilitator will seek to take the participants into areas that can prove fruitful. The participants alone describe and define the world, deciding how it works, and the facilitator is not free to disagree, or to offer any contributions other than to ask more penetrating questions. The facilitator is not present within the world, whereas the participants are deeply immersed in it, usually in remarkably precise consensus with one another.

Absolutely any aspect of life can be 'viewed' within the simulated world. Particularly rich environments to visit are schools, hospitals, churches, universities, offices, factories and cinemas. The way the world brings up its children is always profoundly illuminating. Housing and industrial estates are useful, as any aspect of them can be freely explored in great detail. It can also be useful for participants to be 'invited' by locals to dinner, where they can meet other locals and talk frankly about the world, for example about food, how it is grown, the arts, politics, religion and so on. In corporate work a company can be explored in infinite detail from reception to the

boardroom, and from product design to marketing. Of particular interest are those parts of the society dealing with chaos, mess, waste, breakdown, ill-health, drugs, social problems, criminality and law enforcement. Every world suffers from these, some far more than others, but they are powerful and often surprising touchstones of how the other world operates.

Nothing ever happens to the tourist while walking through the world in the sense of an event within the other world having a physical impact on him or her, although information is imparted by inhabitants and conversations take place. It is as if the visitor is in a protective bubble that allows observation and communication but not involvement. They are quite safe and untouched, even within for example a violently anarchic world, 'attending' rather than 'participating'. The facilitator does not ask for the group members' inner responses or experiences, or question how they might behave as individuals within this world, merely asking them to observe and report what they see or are told, and what the world feels like.

The 'tour' that the tourist takes in this world does not need to follow a logical narrative. One can go from a primary school to a chemical factory in little more than a blink of an eye, with no more continuity than, for example 'you ask to see a chemical factory – what does it look like and how is it managed?' Many questions can be asked without any narrative context at all – 'how does this world deal with juvenile delinquency?' And the group members themselves can suggest places or topics to 'visit'. The group can also easily enter and leave the world, as there is no sense in which they are 'stuck' in it. For example it is normal that the facilitator might ask group members if they want to explore a particular topic, or if they want to spend more time on some aspect or another. Having said that, if one stays 'outside' too long it does seem to require a very conscious mental effort to get back into the immersive state in which a participant 'opens the door' to a topic and immediately 'knows the answer'. Practice suggests that for example 'late arrivals' to the group of participants in their journey around the world have great difficulty 'joining' without some process leading them into it, eg the initial sequence 'you have just landed, what is the air like, the immediate countryside etc?'

What the picture-making process creates is a synthetic whole-construct cognitive world, and it is the wholeness and the alien otherness (ie 'other' to our habitual Earth) that allows us to immerse within it. (And incidentally, the resulting pictures are in our experience always very beautiful!) The Artworlds process is in effect an immersive brainstorming tool within a pre-defined structure or simulation. As such it is extremely powerful for creative thinking within a known content such as in a world of, for example, joy, learning, peace, violence etc.. In such a case the original picture-making instructions are to draw such a world of joy or whatever, and the objective is to explore what such a world might be like in practice. This is particularly useful for exploring what a newly defined corporate culture might look like in practice, to develop appropriate processes and systems within such a culture, and to design projects and project management in great detail. And it makes it an excellent process for exploring the meaning and implications of an archetype, an emotion or feeling, or an idea. It is also particularly potent at enabling a group to identify a group characteristic, idea or dynamic that is felt but not yet defined, as indeed in identifying brand core (or for that matter, in identifying a desired but undefined corporate culture).

[The Artworlds process can also be applied to visual art, in terms of identifying the artist's articulated view of his or her reality. This works most effectively within contemporary abstract art, as figurative and representative art tends to easily seduce us into our own familiar and rather literal earthly perception and recognition.]