

Designing for Services 2025
Aalto University | Department of design

Business Espoo's Services for the Creatives

TEAM 4

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Executive summary

This proposal outlines a strategy for BE to enhance communication and support for creative entrepreneurs, better serve creative professionals, and contribute to the city's strategic goal of promoting entrepreneurship across various sectors.

The proposal's main goal is to make it easier for creative entrepreneurs to understand and use BE's services. This is because creative professionals often find it difficult to relate to business-minded communication. We propose a pilot program that uses BE's current resources to explore new ways for engagement and knowledge-building within the creative community. In addition, we have outlined a road map for the upcoming years to reach the goal of ensuring creativity thrives in Espoo. This aligns with the vision of Finland's Creative Economy Growth Strategy (2025–2030), which emphasizes that the creative industries will be one of the key sectors contributing to Finland's sustainable growth and community well-being, as well as generating intangible value.

Alongside the pilot program, we provide BE with practical tools and frameworks to adopt new ways of evaluating how to build a stronger foundation of knowledge about the creative field. These tools will help BE expand its understanding of the creative community and establish a more effective communication bridge that connects its current services with creative entrepreneurs.

Through qualitative research and insights we have gathered during our six-week study, the tools will have practical methods for BE to understand and communicate with creatives. By adopting this approach, Business Espoo will learn more about the needs, motivations, and challenges of creative professionals. This proposal will be the foundation for long-term collaboration, which will help BE to design more inclusive, relevant, and impactful services for creatives.

Ultimately, this proposal supports the City of Espoo in strengthening its position as a city of innovation and creativity. Making BE's and the City of Espoo's creative sector services easier for creative professionals to use will help the city's long-term goal of encouraging entrepreneurship in all areas.

Introduction

This project was developed in the context of the Designing for Services course held at Aalto University in collaboration with the city of Espoo. This report communicates the process, findings, and proposal of the project.

The city currently offers free business advisory services through Business Espoo, but not many creatives have been taking advantage of them. We identified the potential cause of this issue as a communication gap between Business Espoo and the creative community. Starting with this, we went on to investigate the issue further for 7 weeks in the context of Designing for Services, a course held at Aalto University.

1. Our research

1.1 Context of the creative field

In recent years, Finland has been working toward the growth and well-being of its creative community. To achieve this goal, a need to support the development of the creative industries was identified. This plan was made official by the recent Creative Economy Growth Strategy of 2025-2030, produced with the collaboration of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture, together with creatives and the Advisory Board of the Creative Economy.

The main goal within the report is to strengthen Finland's creative businesses and help them grow and possibly open to international markets. However, the Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri (2024) talks about the ambivalent position that artists have towards entrepreneurship: while some of them see it as an option towards financial stability, others see it as something that might restrict their artistic work. At the same time, the creative field is quite difficult to define. Many artists do not work full-time and have multiple sources of income, while many ponder if they should leave the field altogether due to uncertainty. In addition, the terms that artists use to define themselves tend to be broad and not standardized.

Therefore, the creative field is something that has a lot of potential for growth, but at the same time, the field seems to avoid traditional definitions due to ambiguity around the practices of the creatives. For example, in a panel discussion on the Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri from 2023, the question

regarding the segmentation between artistic work, non-artistic work, and work that supports artistic work was answered by author Rosa Liksom like this: “If I clean, wash dishes, or whatever, it is included in the same thing [artistic work]. Truly I do not segment ... it is about a way of life” (reference, translated from Finnish). While this quote seemed challenging to understand in the beginning of our project, it held the key to success.

1.2 Context of Business Espoo

In this broader context, the impact that this project could have on the City of Espoo is to strengthen its position as a city of innovation and creativity. To do so, there's a need to better understand how to support and promote the creatives in Espoo. The city currently offers free business advisory services through Business Espoo, but not many creatives have been taking advantage of them, as noted in the brief handed to us. We identified a communication gap between Business Espoo and the creatives as the root cause of this issue. For this challenge, the brief contained five goals for output:

1. Identify communication gaps between BE's network service providers and creative professionals.
2. Explore tone-of-voice and storytelling methods that feel more relatable to this group.
3. Develop concrete communication concepts or prototypes tailored for creative industry audiences with the BE service network as a basis.
4. Provide BE with insights and tools to flexibly reach a wider range of industries.
5. Test communication concepts during the project, for example, with their peers of different creative segments, to ensure resonance (if time).

1.3. Research activities

We began our research to understand the services offered by Business Espoo and how creatives are categorized within the field. To gather such information, we mainly focused on:

1) Research on Business Espoo and reports (Knowledge)

From the first week of the project, we focused on understanding the broader context in which the project was. To do so, we learned more about the current services offered by Business Espoo and the nationwide strategies regarding creative entrepreneurship, such as the Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri (2024) and the Creative Economy Growth Strategy of 2025-2030 (2025). The objective was to give us a base of information to get a general outlook on the creative field and the strategic aims of the public sector.

2) Interviews with creatives (Connection)

In parallel with the general research, we also started reaching out to creatives through emails. The initial plan was to conduct 80% of them online and 20% in person. This phase is when we encountered the challenge: reaching creatives as outsiders is not easy. Even though we'd been able to obtain the contacts of 14 creatives through external entities such as Creative Finland and Ornamo, we received only two replies. Most of the interviews we did early on were with students we knew.



Fig. 1 A ceramist we interviewed in Habitare during the Helsinki Design Week

It was because of this lack of response to our attempts to contact them via email that we decided to stop waiting for artists to come to us and started going to creative spaces ourselves. We were able to find and attend a few creative events in Helsinki and Espoo: Helsinki Design Market, Habitare, and some student-led events in Aalto. In the end, we were able to speak with 14 creatives from whom we gained many useful insights on who creatives are and what they are looking for. However, despite sending a total of 40 emails throughout the course, only 8 out of the 14 interviews were conducted with participants from live events.



Fig. 2 Some booths in the crafts section Habitare during the Design Week

3) Workshop (Evaluation)

The workshop acted as a step to evaluate our ideas with Business Espoo and helped us define the final details of the insights with the help of the members of Business Espoo. This, in turn, helped us to define the implementation of our insights by focusing on the practical considerations raised in the workshop.

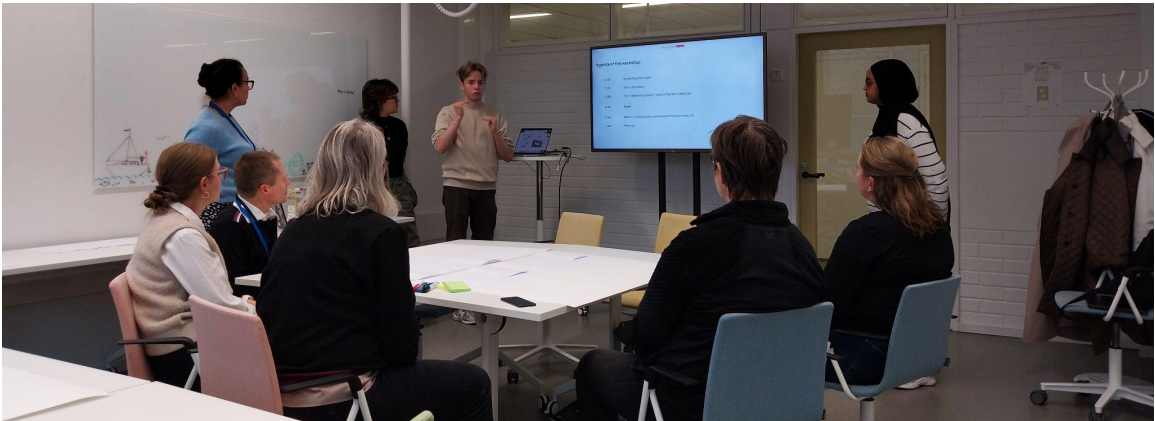


Fig. 3-4 Photos from our workshop with Business Espoo

1.4. An outcome of our research

After we started our research, we started to create a map of stakeholders for us to visualize the closest allies of the creatives. The stakeholder map positions the creative at the center of the map. The further you are from the center, the less likely it is that you are noticed by the creative unless you are a big organization or a governmental support system. This map has a limitation in that it primarily focuses on creatives who work with physical artworks, yet it still emphasizes the distance that these creatives feel from business advisory services.

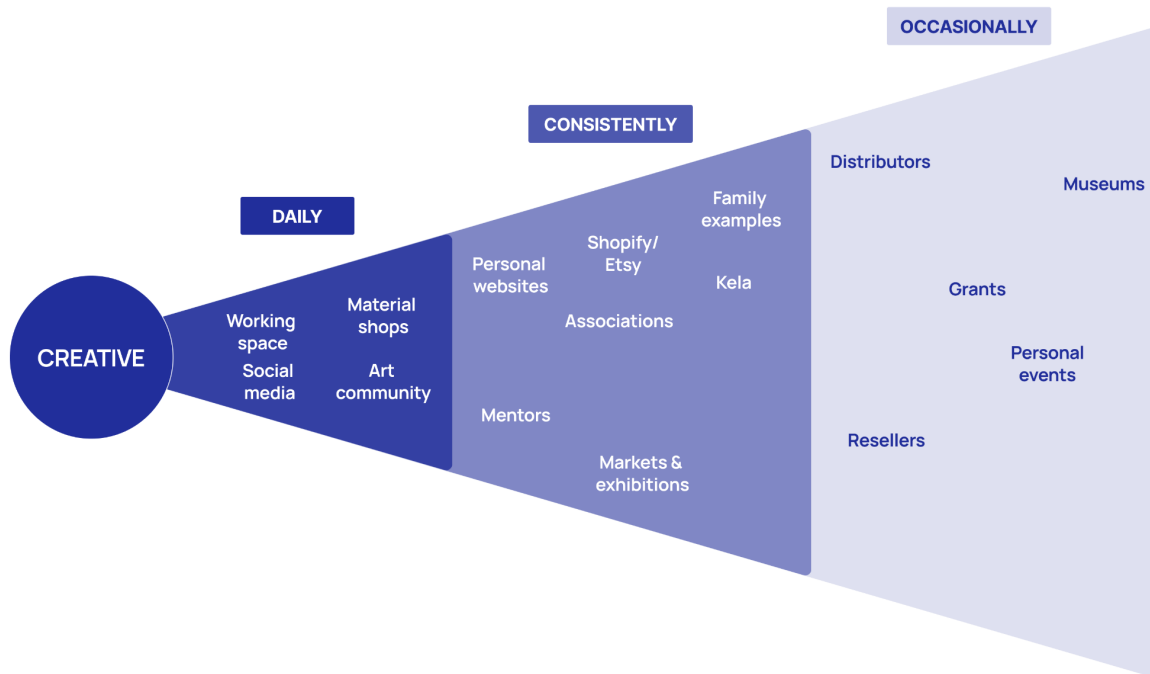


Fig. 5 Stakeholder map of a creative developed by us

2. The solution

In this section, we discuss the approach that overcomes the communication gap between Business Espoo and creatives, how BE can conceptualize the creative sector as a whole, and how it can be mapped out on a strategic level.

2.1 Focus on the needs, not the field, of the creative

Even though we did not put ourselves on the stakeholder map, it is likely that we would have been even further away than the business advisory services. This was precisely the likely reason why our approaches were not successful. Our distance from the creatives resulted in a lack of understanding of their needs. While they might have been interested in talking to us or participating in our workshop, nevertheless, they did not reach back. They did not see our goals as relevant to them because if they had, they would have prioritized us more. In other words, they did not see their needs getting met by us, because our goals were too focused on our own goal of better communication rather than understanding their needs. Therefore, we hope that our proposal will align the goals of Business Espoo with the needs of creatives, fostering a more successful connection to the creative field.

Focusing on the needs of creatives rather than the creative field can help prioritize the individuals over the characteristics that distinguish them from other fields. Another benefit from focusing on the needs is that the emphasis on understanding the differences between fields lessens. A need might be the same across creative fields with small differences; for example, focusing on one need from a painter might help a designer as a side effect. When the creatives experience that Business Espoo understands and focuses on their needs, it becomes easier for them to succeed.

2.2 Understand the needs through knowledge gained from connections

To start to understand the needs of the creatives, there must be some base knowledge and connections. This report and the materials we provide serve as a foundation for understanding the world of creatives. Therefore, connections are vital when considering the outcomes of this project. You can assess results by the number of connections, as more connections (people and organizations that consistently respond to your requests) give you more ways to gather information. The more information you have, the better you understand different needs. Therefore, the process is an evolving loop in which having more connections enhances your understanding of what creatives need, enabling you to make more accurate decisions about what to develop to meet those needs.

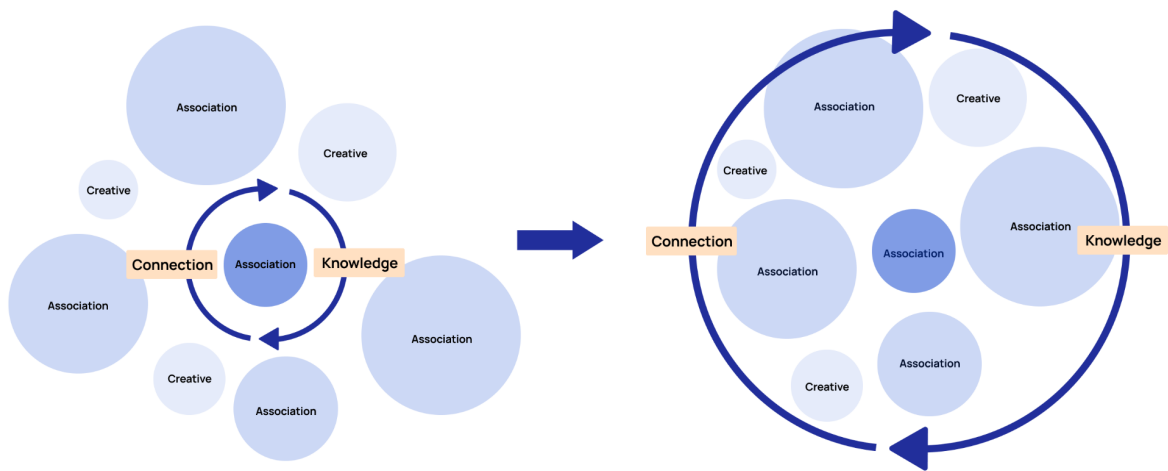


Fig. 6 *Connection-knowledge cycle*

However, finding these specific creatives may be difficult at first, as it is hard to know where to look. As a starting point, mapping out and immersing in a creative field is easier, as professions are segmented into fields. Therefore, we recommend beginning with a creative field or two that Business Espoo is most familiar with. For example, if you have helped game designers, you have connections to them, and alongside them, you can reach out to events and associations that are networks of creatives. The more connections your contacts have, the more information you will receive from them. Our interviews revealed that individuals with connections to associations or groups of creatives were able to provide additional information about other creatives they knew. In the end, the bigger the web you can create, the more likely it is that creatives are caught in the web.

3. Implement the solution

This section further investigates the solution by proposing a concrete plan to implement the new way of thinking in order to gain connections and knowledge.

3.1 What is the implementation?

To help with the web creation, we are proposing a pilot program. The pilot will be a program to gather knowledge and connections before introducing it more widely. It will allow you time to gather knowledge directly from creatives and identify possible ways BE can communicate more effectively with creatives. New knowledge, therefore, acts like a guide for you to take more effective actions; you just have to have the relevant questions to ask. At first, the questions are broad, but they become more detailed as you learn more. For the questions you ask to be as beneficial as possible, you should try to keep creatives in focus as much of the time as possible.

Therefore, the primary goal of this pilot is to build connections with creatives, test communication approaches, and evaluate the internal and external readiness of BE to interact and engage with this new audience. By the end of the pilot, there will be a clearer understanding of how BE can position itself within the creative field. In addition, Business Espoo should have a strong foundational understanding of the creative industry and the ability to identify what resources and strategies are needed for long-term engagement. This one-year pilot will serve as the foundation for a long-term roadmap, helping BE to understand how to communicate, collaborate, and provide services for creatives in a meaningful way.

3.2 What help have we prepared for you?

The tools are early insights gathered during our project that help you construct a shared and deeper understanding of the creative field before and during the pilot, and support evidence-based decisions that can help build the long-term road. The pilot makes use of the following tools and frameworks.

Creative Universe Matrix:

This will help to see where each creative positions themselves, depending on the support and commitment they have for their business.

Insights:

A synthesized observation of data to help you provide a fact-based understanding of what matters to creatives and key learning about creatives' behaviors, goals, and needs.

Archetypes and creative stories:

A deeper understanding of the underlying motivations behind creatives' behavior can lead to more effective communication for BE.

Creative journeys:

To help you gain deeper insight into creatives' motivation, needs, and pain points, BE can provide better communication and services that are relevant to the creatives' journey.

List of associations:

To help start contacting and identifying key networks and collaboration opportunities

These tools provide a strong foundation for the pilot. They will help you guide the design of the pilot activities toward meaningful engagement with the creatives.

3.3 The steps of the pilot

The pilot is intended to be a low-risk, high-learning strategy for BE to deepen their understanding of the creative ecosystem and strengthen connections before committing to a larger-scale initiative. You will have the opportunity to engage with creatives directly and gather direct feedback on what they would like to see from BE. The pilot will also provide space to iterate and refine BE tone, channels, and content in real time and slowly build a communication strategy that resonates with creatives. Finally, prioritize what BE wants to focus on and assess how well BE can reach and engage creatives with the resources at hand. We have structured it around a clear timeline and have set concrete steps from exploration to validation.

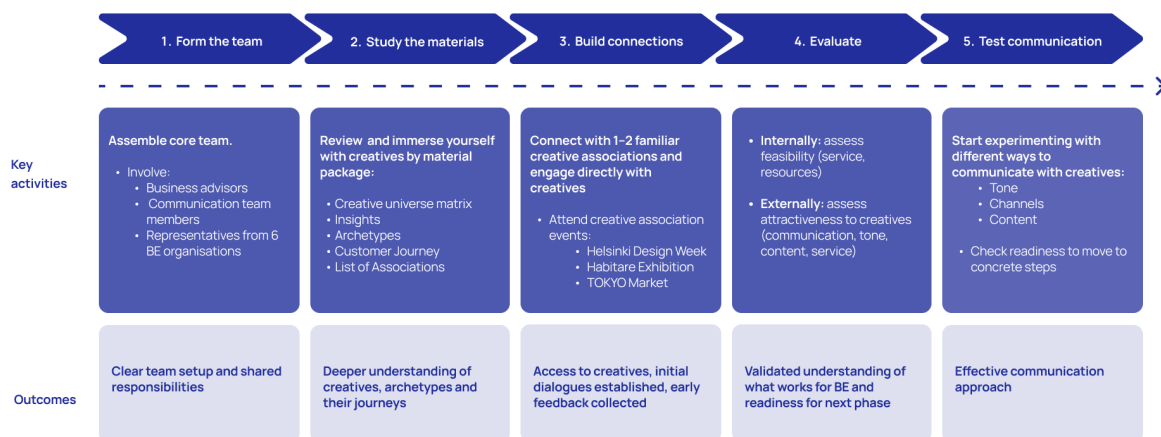


Fig. 7 The pilot project we developed

The core objective will include:

1) Forming a team:

Assembling the team is the first essential step for the pilot's success. We recommend creating a diverse team that includes business advisors, communication team members, and ideally, other representatives from the BE organization. This approach will help BE establish a clear team structure and shared responsibilities, fostering more productive collaboration in the future.

2) Studying the materials:

We have provided BE materials to help users become familiar with the creative universe and immerse themselves in it. The materials will include a creative matrix, archetypes, insights, creative journeys, etc.

3) Connect with 1-2 creative associations and attend events:

This will help you gain more access to creatives and directly engage in conversations with them. We also recommend going to creative events such as Helsinki Design Week, Habitare exhibitions, etc. This strategy has been a successful approach to creatives, and we encourage you to continue. Through participating in events, you will gather feedback from creatives.

4) Evaluate and prioritize:

Once you have explored the role of creatives and gotten feedback, BE can assess the feasibility and attractiveness of BE services and start pinpointing the knowledge and resource gaps. What services creatives truly need and where BE can provide unique value for them. At the same time, BE can identify what is missing and determine which part of their current communication or services is unclear to creatives.

5) Test the communication:

Once BE has identified the issues, they can start testing new communication methods that are practical and easy to implement. Start focusing on one aspect of the communication method you want to change.

3.4 A list of concrete changes, with an asterisk

As the pilot comes to the final phase, the following concrete steps and actions will guide the transition to the next phase. It is recommended that BE take these steps to improve its communication with creatives, which will make it simpler for them to understand, connect, and trust. We formulated these concrete steps based on notes about BE services and the general expectations for business advising that emerged from our interviews. However, to implement these steps accurately, we have some guiding questions to assist with the process.

1. Clarify the BE services and practical details

- a. Clearly state that BE services are free of charge and specify how long each step or service typically takes.
- b. Provide a concise overview of grants and services in an easy language, and easily navigate the sections

2. Improve structure and accessibility.

- a. Create a clearer segmentation between different fields on the website so the creatives can navigate through easily and find relevant content.
- b. Create creative-themed webinars specific to the creative field to address their unique challenges and opportunities.
- c. Tell clearly what you should have on hand before you contact BE (calculations for more established businesses or ideations for those starting, and how detailed they should be)
- d. Offer low-threshold contact options (short call slots, chatbot) to make the interactions easier and quicker.

3. Strengthen communication and online presence

- a. Add success stories (interview-style short videos, social media posts) to highlight creative entrepreneurship.
- b. Introduce BE's business advisers more and showcase their expertise and in what way they can help creatives.
- c. Publish more basic and practical information directly on the website with clear visuals and images.
- d. Verbalize BE's own goals more clearly on the front page by outlining the mission values and what BE aims to achieve with creatives.

3.5 After the pilot

Insights gathered during the pilot will directly inform the long-term roadmap for BE's creative strategy in Espoo. This aligns with the Creative Economy Growth Strategy 2025–2030: In 2030, creative industries aim to be one of the key sectors contributing to Finland's sustainable growth and community well-being, as well as generating intangible value.



Fig. 8 A contextualization of the pilot in a broader context: what will happen after?

To reach this goal, in 2026, BE will start with the pilot and immerse themselves with creatives, forming teams and building connections to lay the groundwork. The pilot stage lasts one year, during which Business Espoo should evaluate the progress and refine the approach. By 2027, Business Espoo could align goals with creative associations and develop strategies to improve the services. The ultimate aim for BE could be to make creatives thrive in Espoo by 2030, fostering community building through networking, specific help with toolboxes for creatives, and mentorship programs.

4. The knowledge to get started

In this section, we provide detailed information about the specific tools used in the pilot program, the main story behind these tools, and our initial breakthrough that led us to focus on needs-based segmentation. The tools are based on insights and information gathered from the interviews and communication with creatives that we analyzed, but the final forms of the tools were gained from a workshop that we did with Business Espoo.

4.1 The great story of the creatives

Based on the insights from our research and collaboration workshop, the big story that we propose is “Entrepreneurship is a tool, not an identity.” As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the answer of Rosa Liksom was the key to all of this; the creatives are always creatives first and foremost. We noticed that most of the creatives we interviewed had uncertainty towards entrepreneurship, seeing it as something distant from their core creative identity rather than a means to support it. Therefore, by shifting the perspective, entrepreneurship can be understood as a tool that creatives use to run their business while reducing the pressure of losing their creative identity. In this way, the concept of entrepreneurship becomes something that is more aligned with the creatives’ goals.



Fig. 9 Quotes from our interviews with creatives

This is the story that the pilot is based on and is the basic need behind creatives. It is the need that, had we figured it out from the beginning, could have helped us to get in contact with creatives more consistently. When creativity is in focus and entrepreneurship is there to support it, the needs of the

creative are in focus, which can be achieved through entrepreneurship. Through this realization, we started to understand that knowledge of what the creatives see as their needs is the key to connecting with them. All of the tools that we created to help you are built upon this story.

4.2 Matrix: What is the creative field?

There were two subjects that the creatives brought up in all of our interviews; the creatives seemed to distinguish themselves not only by their field but also by how much they work and with whom. From here, the matrix is based on two dimensions: the x-axis represents occasional versus full-time business engagement, and the y-axis represents reliance on individual work versus community help. It builds upon the entrepreneurial story; the x-axis is therefore helping to define the services or tools that the creatives need based on their commitment, whereas the y-axis is about the methods of delivery for the tools. The picture that the matrix paints of the creative field is about the communal needs and the professional needs of the creatives.

This tool is meant for understanding the creatives as a sector defined by their commitment and level of involvement in the community. The matrix is a tool that can help you map out your creative connections and better understand what their needs might be. It can help you narrow down the scope of where you want to focus when deciding whose needs you want to focus on more as a starting point. For example, within the gaming industry, some creatives work as freelancers on a project basis, while small companies employ multiple creatives to operate in a more organized manner. These two examples would be in different quadrants of the matrix with different needs for business advisory, and therefore, it would be easier to focus on one type of need first. The matrix is there to help make these higher-level decisions.

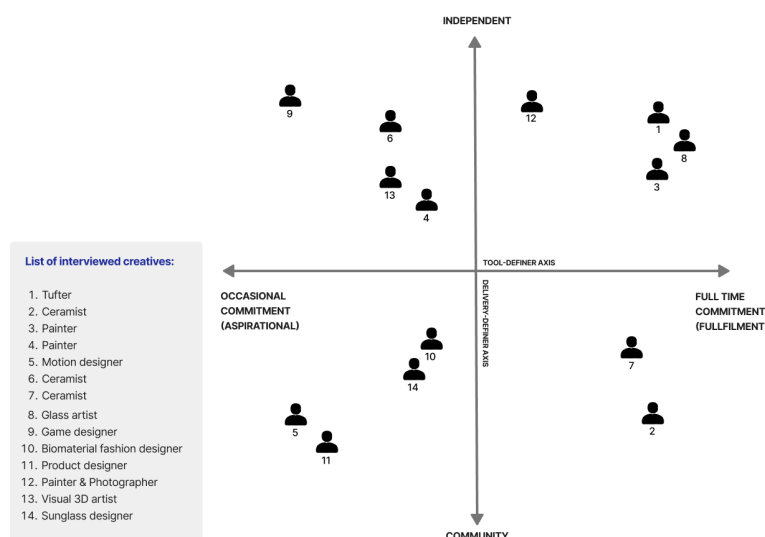


Fig. 10 Creative Universe Matrix mapping out our interviewees

4.3 Insights: How does BE relate to the creative field?

Alongside the matrix, and combining the research we have done, we clustered the findings of the interviews, and there were four insights that came out of the analysis. Following the collaborative workshop, we gained two extra insights. Similar to the matrix, insights are a tool for understanding the field of creativity. They are organized in the same format as the matrix, concentrating on insights that can help define services or tools and considering their delivery methods. The insights can be used to obtain a general overview of the creative field and its challenges related to business advisory services, while also allowing for a focus on one specific insight that can lead to concrete actions for developing Business Espoo's services in conjunction with other tools. Each of the insights has a quote from our interview material that represents the core of the insight, followed by a deeper explanation and an emphasis on why it is important to keep the insight in mind.

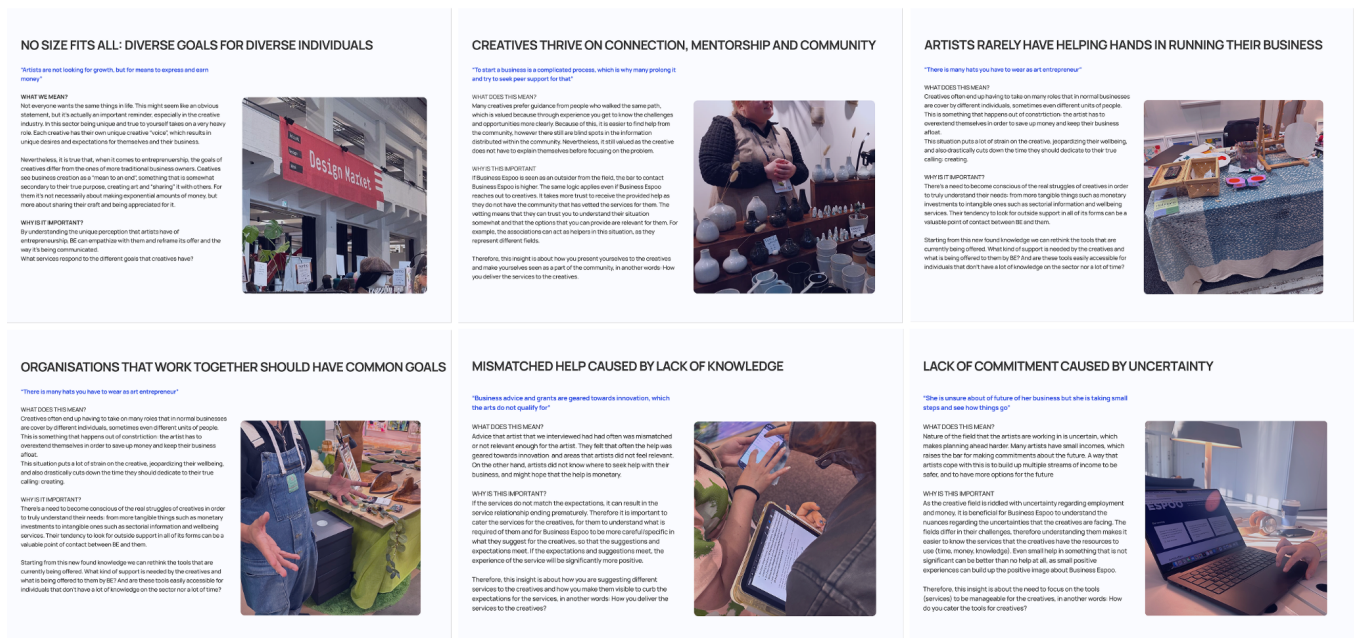


Fig. 11-16 Our final 6 insights

4.4 Archetypes: Who are the creatives?

Continuing with the matrix as a base, the four areas in the matrix correspond to four archetypes, each facing distinct challenges and requiring different types of support when engaging with external services. The archetypes are tools to encourage empathy toward the creatives and to stir reflection about their needs. What do they mean by success? What is growth for creatives in different fields? The tool can help Business Espoo to understand the usual challenges in the creatives' lives regarding their creative needs.

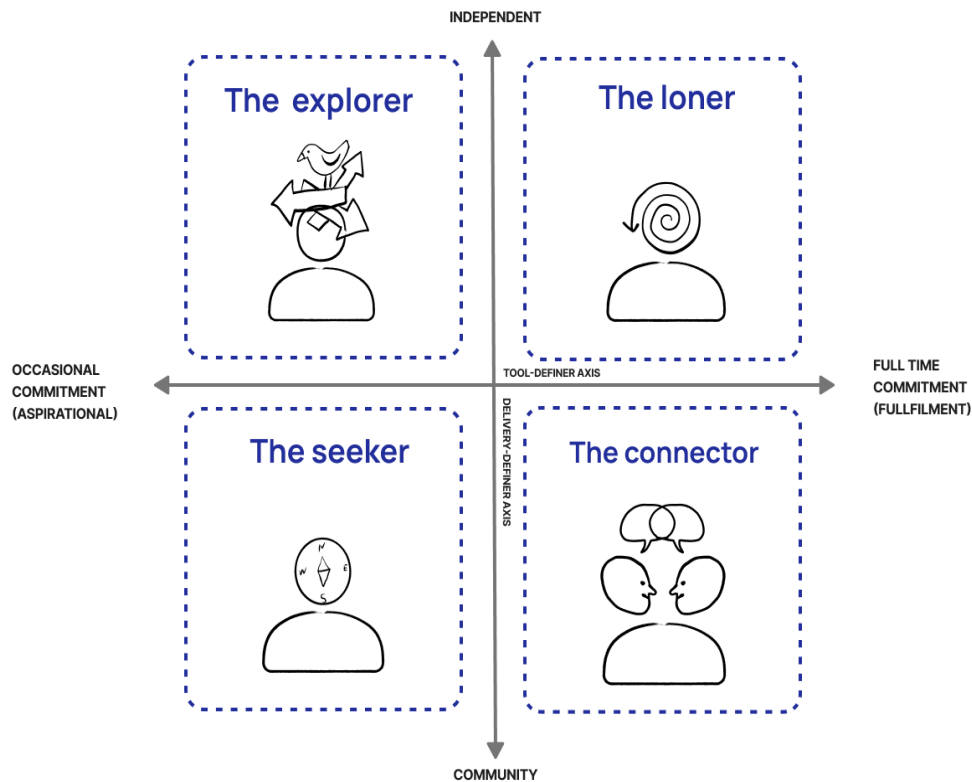


Fig. 17 *The 4 archetypes that emerge from the four quadrants of the Creative Universe Matrix*

Four different archetypes were identified based on two sets of parameters in the matrix. We mapped the interviewed creatives to our matrix, then reviewed the notes for commonalities. The explorer is the least established archetype and faces the most uncertainty because they have less knowledge and fewer connections. The seeker is not yet established, as they do creative work part-time, but they have more connections to rely upon within the field than the explorer; students can fall into this category. The loner, on the other hand, is probably someone who has worked for a while already but has always tried to figure things out by themselves and not rely on the community for business advice. The connector is an expert in their own field; they do their work full-time and are well-acquainted with the other creatives in their field. In other words, they might not need help running the business, but they might need help seeing possibilities to do things in a new way or be open to expanding their repertoire.

4.5 Customer journeys: What are the stories of the creatives?

With all the materials gathered from the previous stages, Business Espoo can now gain a clearer and more concrete understanding of who the creatives are and which archetype they belong to. Based on the segmentation from the Creative Universe Matrix, creatives within each archetype tend to face

similar pain points along a shared path that we refer to as the customer journeys. These journeys summarize the challenges that creatives frequently encountered, which hindered their ability to meet their needs as artists. They are based on the interview notes, and the Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri (2024) are syntheses of stories that we heard through the research process and were validated in the workshop.

The customer journey is another tool for Business Espoo to empathize with creatives. The tool focuses on the specific challenges that can lead to more concrete ideas on how to approach creatives (how to deliver the tools) and how to cater different services to them (what tools to choose for them). In combination with the matrix and insights, the journeys can bring another layer of concretization when focusing on a specific field of creatives and their needs.

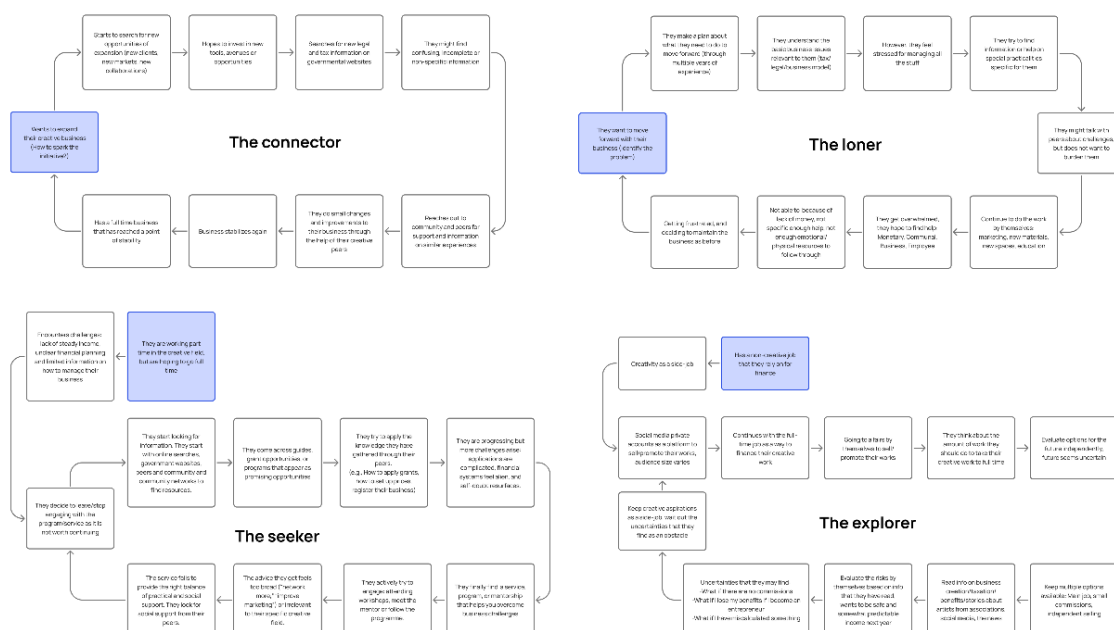


Fig. 18 Creative (customer) journey

4.6 A new mindset shaped by the tools

All these materials provide a new way of evaluating how Business Espoo can build a stronger foundation of knowledge about creatives and later expand this understanding when establishing a communication bridge that connects its current services with the creative community. By studying the journey, and comparing it with the current Business Espoo services, potential entry points can be identified to inform the service refinement phase in a later stage. Furthermore, the establishment of deeper connections with creatives may lead to the emergence of additional archetypes, which could reveal new perspectives and opportunities for support.

5. Conclusion

What to keep in mind? Focus on the needs of the creatives whenever you are studying, approaching, or helping them. The needs guide to the services that are beneficial to creatives, because the creatives' needs revolve around creativity, not entrepreneurship. Therefore, there is a need for help for Business Espoo to understand the creatives' mind, and it is a way to align the goals of Business Espoo with those of the creatives. Understanding the needs provides insights that help build connections, leading to new knowledge.

You don't have to focus on all the creatives at once or only on the needs from the start. It's better to start with a familiar creative field, as knowledge from one field may apply to another. For this process, we suggested the pilot program, which would be low-intensity and high-learning, be done alongside other work within Business Espoo. We provide you with the necessary tools to establish your entry point.

Moreover, this mindset shift is not limited to the creative field only; it can serve as a valuable framework for Business Espoo to become connected with other sectors as well. Placing customers and their real needs at the center of service development is proven to enhance customer satisfaction, strengthen relationships, and lead to more sustainable long-term impact.

As a final note for you, do not fear making decisions or failures, but rather be open to reflecting on if something fails and try it again.

6. Reference

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Tools

1. Creative universe matrix
2. Insights
3. Creative archetypes
4. Creative journeys
5. List of associations
6. Raw data (surveys & interview notes)

Creative journeys

Archetypes

Creative universe matrix