

EDITORIAL

## *Make Art as if Your Life Depended on It* *Trauma-Informed Care in the Creative Industries*

Olaf Kuhlke  
*Minneapolis College of Art  
and Design*

*I often like to say my job is being vulnerable for sport.*

—Maggie Rogers, Singer-Songwriter

### **The Harsh Landscape of the Arts and Creative Entrepreneurship**

The world of art and design, and the creative industries in general, aren't for the faint of heart. Anyone trying to build a career here—especially as an entrepreneur—faces a unique set of challenges that can feel like an obstacle course. The traditional startup world might be brutal, but arts entrepreneurship is its own brand of gladiatorial. There's the constant need to push boundaries, stand out, fight for attention in an oversaturated attention economy, and monetize work that often emerges from deeply personal places. On the other hand, many creatives usually channel their trauma into entrepreneurship, and you might say that their trauma is at the root of their business endeavors (Shepherd and Williams, 2020).

Our current approaches to building successful arts-based businesses, as well as our current scholarly foci in arts entrepreneurship, treat artists working alone or collectively like independent businesses, ignoring one fundamental factor: trauma. Many artists carry deep, personal narratives of struggle, loss, and resilience into their work. These stories are often what make their creations powerful. But without support, that same trauma can be what causes artists to burn out, lose direction, or even abandon their work entirely (Głaziewicz and Golonka, 2024).

It's time to start thinking of trauma-informed arts entrepreneurship as not only a

humane approach but a smart one. In a creative economy and art market that is increasingly aware of and calling for authenticity and resilience, the trauma-informed care model just might be the competitive advantage we've been ignoring. Trauma and art are age-old partners.

A trauma-informed [care] approach reflects adherence to six key principles rather than a prescribed set of practices or procedures: 1. Safety, 2. Trustworthiness and Transparency, 3. Peer Support, 4. Collaboration and Mutuality, 5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice, and 6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues. A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization. (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 10)

Historically, some of the most celebrated artists have channeled their inner pain into work that resonates universally. But while trauma can drive incredible creative output, it can also be a barrier to entrepreneurial success. There's a crucial paradox: the same struggle that makes art relatable and powerful can leave artists vulnerable. These creatives are often the first to face issues like impostor syndrome, anxiety, and burnout—all while trying to build a career out of their passion (Carroll, 2022).

We need to remind ourselves that creativity is an inherently vulnerable act. It's a form of storytelling that connects people, sometimes across massive divides—geographically, ideologically, and culturally. But expecting artists to bring that vulnerability to the world while also maintaining the sharp skills and relentless energy needed for entrepreneurship is unrealistic. When we create space to address trauma, we're not only helping artists thrive; we're fortifying the cultural impact of their work.

## **Why the Creative Economy Should Embrace Trauma-Informed Care**

You might be thinking, "Why should the creative economy care?" The answer is simple: First, it's good business—and second, it's the *right thing to do* from an economics and ethics perspective (Klamer, 2017). The most successful entrepreneurs are those who can hold both vision and resilience in balance. When artists are trauma-informed—when they have support networks, mentorship, and resources that recognize the impacts of trauma—they're more likely to succeed. This reduces turnover, increases engagement, and strengthens loyalty—all essential metrics for sustainable ventures in any industry.

Businesses that create real support structures that understand the human element in productivity outperform those that don't (Bartram and Casimir, 2007). Creative entrepreneurship can follow the same path. A trauma-informed care model doesn't just "feel good"; it has tangible returns. And in a sector where the product is often an extension of the

creator’s inner world, supporting that creator isn’t optional—it’s essential. Trauma-informed care creates healthier, more resilient artists who can sustain their careers long-term, which means a stronger, more consistent output that audiences will notice and remember.

## **The Trauma-Informed Entrepreneurial Advantage: From the Individual to the Economy**

So, what does it mean to be “trauma-informed” in the context of creative entrepreneurship? Essentially, it’s a model that considers the mental, emotional, and physical impacts of trauma on an individual’s ability to succeed. It means recognizing that, sometimes, the most successful way forward isn’t pushing harder but working more compassionately—with empathy and intention.

When you bring a trauma-informed lens to creative entrepreneurship, you’re not just providing counsel or patting artists on the back. You’re investing in the long-term success of their work. This doesn’t just mean fewer dropouts; it means better work, work that resonates, work that can stand the test of time. Trauma-informed entrepreneurship considers the artist’s journey as a whole, which allows individuals to create a more durable impact and body of work. An artist who feels supported and understood will put out work that’s more innovative, more meaningful, and ultimately more valuable.

At a community level, trauma-informed creative entrepreneurship can become a cornerstone of local creative economies. In regions where the arts are critical to the cultural fabric—places like Minneapolis or Austin—supporting artists isn’t just about personal success. It’s about building an economy where creatives can sustain themselves and contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of their communities.

Fostering healthier, more resilient artists has ripple effects beyond individual success. When artists are supported, they’re more likely to give back, teach, collaborate, and build networks that make their communities more vibrant (Densmore-Bey, 2023). Trauma-informed approaches aren’t just about keeping artists afloat—they’re about enabling these individuals to become cultural leaders. That’s a form of economic resilience that’s hard to find elsewhere. There’s an emerging market opportunity in supporting not just the production of art but the person behind it.

## **A Call to Action—Strategies and Research Directions to Make it Work**

The call for trauma-informed practices in arts entrepreneurship opens a wide range of research opportunities that can support more sustainable and resilient creative industries. Here, I’d like to outline key areas where further research is needed and connect them with ongoing scholarly work and emerging trends in the field.

## 1. Longitudinal Studies on the Impact of Trauma-Informed Practices

There is a growing body of literature suggesting that trauma-informed care in other fields, such as education and healthcare, leads to improved outcomes (SAMHSA 2014). However, the creative industries lack comprehensive longitudinal studies to evaluate how trauma-informed approaches impact the long-term success of artists and creative entrepreneurs. Research that tracks artists over several years, examining metrics like career longevity, mental health, productivity, and business growth, is crucial.

For example, researchers could investigate the effectiveness of trauma-informed programs in arts incubators, tracking participants' mental health outcomes and business sustainability over time. Programs such as *Creatives Care* (<https://www.creativescare.org/>) and similar initiatives offer fertile ground for such studies.

## 2. Efficacy of Mental Health Integration in Creative Industry Accelerators

Incorporating mental health support into entrepreneurship programs is an emerging practice, but empirical research on its efficacy in the creative sector is limited. Studies could explore how different types of mental health interventions—such as therapy, mindfulness training, and trauma-informed coaching—affect artists' ability to navigate entrepreneurial challenges. Relevant ongoing research includes the work of Głaziewicz and Golonka (2024), who explore the relationship between mental health and creative output. Expanding this to include structured mental health programs in arts accelerators could yield actionable insights.

## 3. Trauma-Informed Training for Stakeholders

Research is needed to design, implement, and evaluate trauma-informed training for gallery owners, investors, managers, and other stakeholders in the creative economy. Studies could measure how such training influences stakeholder interactions with artists and impacts artists' career satisfaction and business outcomes.

For instance, Bartram and Casimir (2007) highlight how management practices that consider employee well-being improve productivity. Applying these principles to creative entrepreneurship and testing their effectiveness could help develop best practices for the creative industries.

## 4. Community-building and Peer Support Models

Isolation is a significant barrier for many artists. Research into community-building initiatives—such as peer support networks, mentorship programs, and collective workspaces—can provide insights into how these models mitigate trauma and enhance resilience. Future studies should analyze whether and how artists in trauma-informed communities experience lower rates of burnout and higher levels of innovation compared to those working in isolation.

## 5. Neurodivergence and Trauma-Informed Practices

Artists who are neurodivergent often face unique challenges and may benefit significantly from trauma-informed approaches. Research into how trauma-informed practices can be tailored to neurodivergent creatives is needed.

## 6. Economic Impact of Trauma-Informed Creative Entrepreneurship

Empirical research on the economic outcomes of trauma-informed models is essential to demonstrate their value beyond anecdotal evidence. Studies could investigate how trauma-informed practices influence key financial indicators, such as revenue growth, audience engagement, and market expansion.

Building on the work of Klamer (2017), who emphasizes the economic significance of cultural value, researchers can explore how supporting artists' mental health contributes to a more vibrant and economically resilient creative sector.

## 7. Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to Trauma-Informed Creative Entrepreneurship

The intersection of creative entrepreneurship with psychology, business, and social work offers a rich area for interdisciplinary research. Collaborations between researchers in these fields can yield holistic models for trauma-informed entrepreneurship at large.

## Conclusion: Charting the Path Forward

The research implications outlined here are not just theoretical exercises; they are essential steps toward creating a sustainable and humane model for arts entrepreneurship. By building an evidence base for trauma-informed practices, we can support artists as whole people and fortify the creative industry as a vital part of our economy and culture.

If the creative industry wants to remain relevant and commercially viable, trauma-informed practices can't be an afterthought. They're essential to building the kind of ecosystem that draws in and retains talent, produces work with impact, and makes the arts a thriving part of our economy. The future of creative entrepreneurship isn't just about creating more artists—it's about creating a system where artists can thrive, where their work can resonate, and where they're supported as whole people.

I teach and research at an art and design college—the Minneapolis College of Art and Design—where we have embedded a new course, "Creating Valued Workplaces," into our Bachelor of Science degree program in Creative Entrepreneurship. This course felt essential because we believe that attending to each other's mental and physical health is not an afterthought of entrepreneurship but a centerpiece that reduces stress, burnout, and the development of other traumas that impact artists as they navigate their careers.

### **ARTIVATE 13**

With a trauma-informed foundation, arts entrepreneurship can drive meaningful change in our communities and beyond. Let's envision a future where art is an even more powerful pathway to healing, a community-builder, and an economic force.

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