

*We asked how to realize a positive digital future in arts and culture.
DigitalASO's Knowledge Framework offers up your big ideas and inspired dreams.*

DigitalASO Knowledge Framework (Preview)

Today, we are excited to preview the design of a new Knowledge Framework (see Figure 1 below) which seeks to illustrate insights from our national ecosystem-building initiative, DigitalASO.

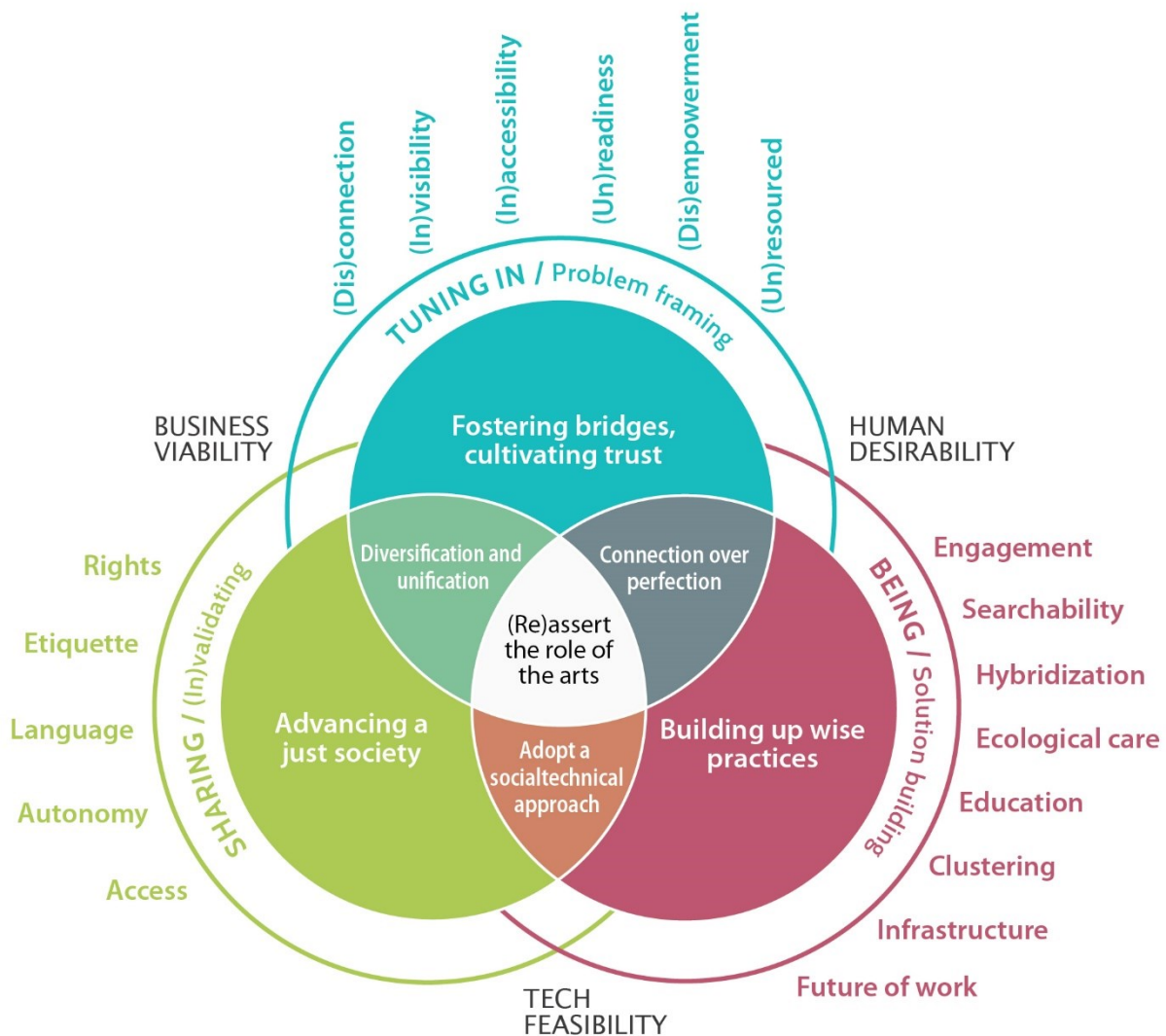
Subject to change, this emerging framework outlines a community-sourced vision for realizing a positive digital future in Canadian arts and culture. It strives to outline key problems, opportunities, and measures to validate (or invalidate) the digital transformation efforts of Canadian support services and other changemakers in arts and culture. It is based upon the many personal stories and collective gifts of knowledge shared by a diverse group of individual arts workers and arts organizations from Western, Northern, and Central Canada in 2020 and 2021. Additional consultations for DigitalASO that are upcoming include Quebec, Maritimes, and Atlantic Canada in 2022. Stay tuned!

In this post, we introduce the knowledge elements that have been developed thus far. A more detailed discussion with examples and recommendations for next steps will be published in 2022 as a part of the final report for DigitalASO Phase 2. This upcoming report is called, *So Far: Collective steps toward a positive digital future in Canadian arts and culture*.

DigitalASO's Knowledge Framework has been developed in an open format that will continue to evolve. We value and invite your thoughts at hello@artspond.com or via social media with the hashtag **#digitalsofar**.

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Figure 1:
DigitalASO Knowledge Framework
Steps toward a positive digital future in Canadian arts and culture



Guiding questions

Key participant questions that guided the design of DigitalASO's Knowledge Framework included:

- What are the roles of arts and culture in a digital society?
- What does a positive digital future in arts and culture look like?
- What is needed for support services in arts and culture to help realize this positive digital future?

Additional questions included:

- What does sectoral change (including digital transformation) look like?
- What is the value of difference that can shape the context of digital and the technologies in our lives?
- What services or solutions are the arts uniquely positioned to offer in a digital sphere?

Vision

In our analysis of their stories and knowledge, DigitalASO participants collectively expressed a vision for realizing a positive digital future in Canadian arts and culture that **(re)asserts the role of the arts** in both real and virtual life/spaces.

In our conversations, participants highlighted the challenges and opportunities of being both helped and hindered/harmed by digital. This contradictory dichotomy reverberates deeply within the lives and experiences of creators and producers on both sides of the human-digital divide. This vision to (re)assert the role of the arts seeks to take hold of (or to take back, where it has been lost) the potential of digital to amplify an empowering expression of arts and culture that strengthens both real and virtual communities.

Visually, this vision is placed at the center of the Knowledge Framework's Venn diagram, which is illustrated in Figure 1 above as black text on a white background.

Themes

Three essential themes were identified in our analysis as necessary steps (or precursors) to realizing the participants' collective vision described above. They are illustrated in the Venn diagram in Figure 1 above as white text inside three overlapping circles with teal blue, reddish purple, and bright green backgrounds. They include:

- **Fostering bridges, cultivating trust**

The focus of this theme is to foster meaningful and trusting relationships between creators and community. Learning from past experience, this theme seeks to underline the aspects of digital that both hinder/harm and help support artistic and cultural engagement.

To realize a positive digital future, mitigating factors that need to be balanced under this theme include the hindering/helping dichotomies of: **(dis)connection, (in)visibility, (in)accessibility, (un)readiness [or (dis)comfort], (dis)empowerment, and (un)resourced [or (under)resourced]**.

These factors are visualized at the top of the Venn diagram in Figure 1 above in blue text located around the outside edge of the theme's blue circle. See further below for a more detailed description of these factors.

- **Building up wise practices**

The focus of this theme is building up wise practices in the digital sphere that amplify the positive impacts of arts and culture support services on creators and community. Supporting what is working well in the present moment, while also investing in what is missing for the near future, are both required steps.

To realize a positive digital future, priority issues to support or invest in under this theme include: **engagement, searchability, hybridization, ecological care, education, clustering, infrastructure, and future of work.**

These issues are visualized on the right side of the Venn diagram in Figure 1 above in reddish purple text around the outside edge of the theme's reddish purple circle. See further below for a more detailed description of these issues.

- **Advancing a just society**

The focus of this theme is advancing a just society by applying the potential of digital to promote inclusion, diversity, equity, and access for under-served communities in both real and virtual spaces. In an increasingly virtual world, digital rights are human rights. In the future, the power of artistic expression can help engage and support diverse communities to envision more cooperative and caring alternatives to the harmful, exploitive market forces of platform and surveillance capitalism.

To realize a positive digital future, topics to explore under this theme include: **rights, etiquette, language, autonomy, and access.**

These topics are visualized on the left side of the Venn diagram in Figure 1 above in bright green text around the outside edge of the theme's bright green circle. See further below for a more detailed description of these topics.

Intersections

In the intersecting spaces in-between each of the three themes, our analysis highlighted three additional factors to be considered on the path to the participants' vision of a positive digital future. These factors also align with the three centers or lenses of human-centered design, which are *human desirability, business viability, and tech feasibility*.

- **Connection over perfection**

This factor expresses the desire for technology solutions in arts and culture that are not necessarily perfect, but that prioritize the support of meaningful human connections.

This factor is situated within the lens of human desirability, located in between the themes of "fostering bridges, cultivating trust" and "building up wise practices". In Figure 1, it is visualized with white text on a bluish purple background.

- **Diversification and unification**

This factor highlights the strategy for support services in arts and culture to lead positive change by galvanizing and organizing communities to work together in the digital sphere in a more coordinator manner.

This strategy is situated within the lens of business viability, located in between the themes of "advancing a just society" and "fostering bridges, cultivating trust". In Figure 1, it is visualized with white text on a blue green background.

- **Adopt a social-technical approach**

This factor recommends the benefits of an approach that places equal priority on both social and technical aspects of a solution or ecology as interdependent parts of a complex whole.

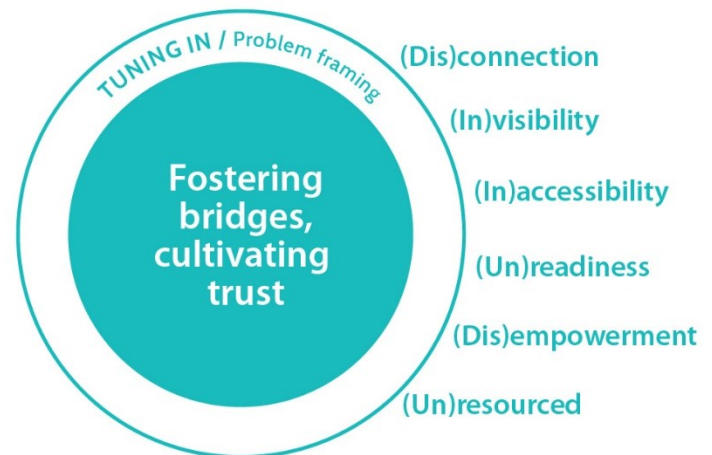
These benefits are situated with the lens of tech feasibility, located in between the themes of "building up wise practices" and "advancing a just society". In Figure 1, it is visualized with white text on a dark orange background.

A more detailed discussion follows.

Fostering bridges, cultivating trust

By closely "tuning in" to the stories of the past and what have learned from them, this "problem-framing" theme helps to better illustrate the current situation and the real human needs and desires that must be balanced on journeys toward a positive digital future.

At their core, participants expressed a deep desire for digital solutions to help strengthen meaningful and trusting relationships within both real and virtual spaces. Within this theme, our analysis identified six contradictory experiences that both support and impede success. They are placed in blue text around the outside edge of the theme's blue circle at the top of the Venn diagram in Figure 1.



They include:

- **(Dis)connection**
Digital is a gateway to boost meaningful human connections, and digital is a barrier to sustain meaningful human connections
- **(In)visibility**
Digital is a means to boost visibility, and digital is a barrier to sustain visibility
- **(In)accessibility**
Digital is a tool to boost inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, and digital is a barrier to sustain inclusion, diversity, equity, and access
- **(Un)readiness [or (dis)comfort]**
Digital readiness or comfort is a means to foster bridges and collaborations, and digital un-readiness or discomfort is a barrier to sustain bridges and collaborations

- **(Dis)empowerment**
Digital empowerment is a means to boost trust and equity, and digital disempowerment is a barrier to sustain trust and equity
- **(Un)resourced [or (under)resourced]**
Digital resources and infrastructure are a means to boost capacity and impact, and lack of digital resources and infrastructure are a barrier to sustain capacity and impact.

Building up wise practices

By "being" thoughtful in the present moment and considering closely what currently available solutions are working well and not working well, as well as collectively seeking consensus on what is missing, this "solution-building" theme helps to identify the kinds of wise practices, accessible platforms, scalable resources, caring interventions, innovative initiatives, and inclusive activities that should be supported in the present or prioritized and developed in the near future.



Within this theme, our analysis of participant responses identified seven areas to focus on in order to realize their vision of a positive digital future. They are placed in reddish purple text around the outside edge of the theme's reddish purple circle on the right side of the Venn diagram in Figure 1. They include building up wise practices and solutions that:

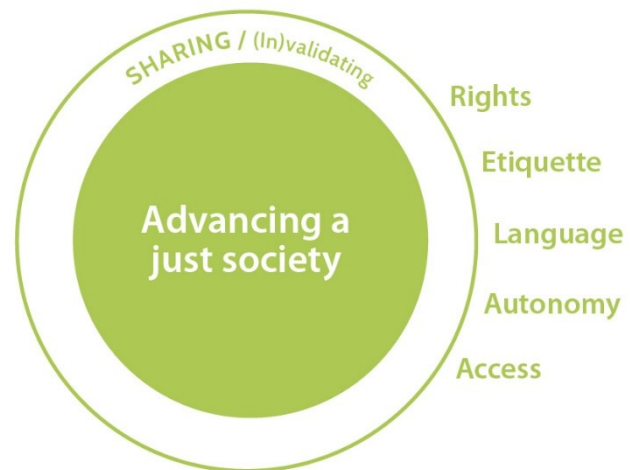
- **Engagement**
Help audiences and stakeholders participate, connect, and engage directly with artists and their activities in a real and virtual world in an enjoyable and inspiring manner
- **Searchability**
Help audiences and stakeholders search and find the artists and activities in a real and virtual world that match their interests in a comfortable and accessible manner
- **Hybridization**
Help unite the best of both real and digital spaces and experiences in the creation, dissemination, and administration of artistic and cultural experiences in a sustainable and enriching manner
- **Ecological care**
Help eliminate the adverse impacts of digital infrastructure on human and natural ecosystems in an enduring and caring manner
- **Education**
Help reduce barriers to digital literacy and intelligence for arts and cultural workers in a supportive and engaging manner, and educate technologists to develop digital solutions that meet the needs of the arts and culture ecology in an effective and practical manner
- **Clustering**
Help the arts and culture ecology work more powerfully together in a feasible and impactful manner

- **Infrastructure**
Help strengthen the accessibility of shared digital infrastructure (hardware, software, financial, human, and other resources) in an affordable and collaborative manner
- **Future of work**
Help arts and culture workers address the changing nature of work by working digitally in an artistically fulfilling and economically sustaining manner.

Advancing a just society

By "sharing" a collective vision of what a positive digital future looks like and how we will know we have arrived there, this "validating, invalidating" theme helps to refine and measure what roles the arts and culture ecology may have in advancing a more equitable and just society through digital means.

While concepts like "digital justice" are very much an emergent topic of inquiry in arts and culture, our analysis of participant responses and other dialogues in the broader ecology has identified five areas to explore. These may serve as safe spaces that mark our path along the murkiest parts of our journey towards a positive digital future.



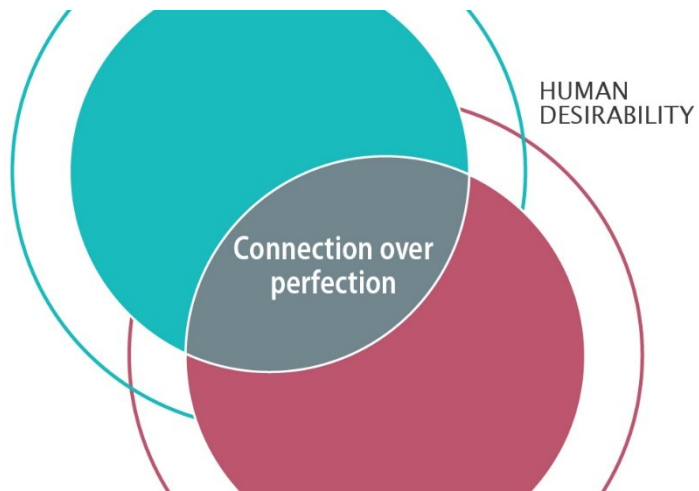
They are placed in green text around the outside edge of the theme's bright green circle on the left side of the Venn diagram in Figure 1. They include:

- **Rights**
Digital rights are human rights
- **Etiquette**
Digital protocols are cooperative and centered in commitments to respect and care for difference
- **Language**
Digital spaces honour and support the wisdom of traditional, Indigenous, and non-Western ways of knowing, being, and doing
- **Autonomy**
Digital economies empower rather than exploit the integrity of individual lives and experiences
- **Access**
Digital technologies are accessible for everyone, including critical access for people with disabilities, affordable access for people from rural and remote communities, equitable access for people from Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups, and inclusive access for low-income, women, youth, and other marginalized, under-served communities.

Connection over perfection

In human-centered design, the center or lens of "human desirability" seeks to understand what people want and whether it will help solve their problems.

In our analysis of participant responses, we identified that what is desired for a positive digital future in arts and culture is not necessarily to find technology solutions that are perfect, but rather solutions that help arts and culture workers engage in, and create spaces for, **meaningful human connections**.

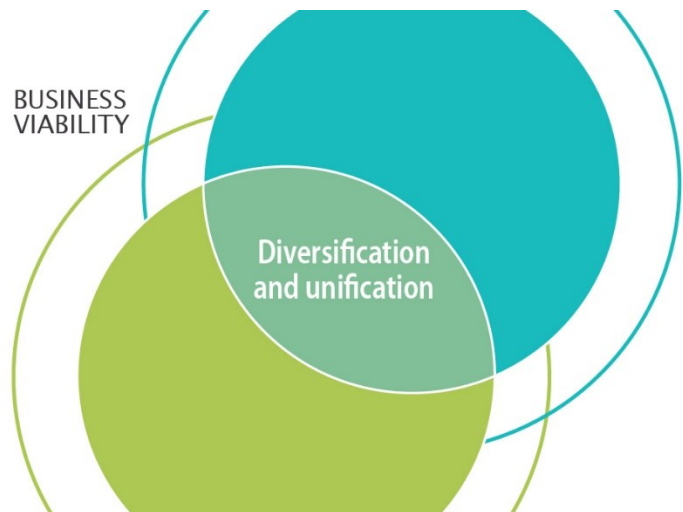


Whether digital solutions help strengthen real and/or online-only communities, participants desired they prioritize the depth of interpersonal human relationships at all costs.

Diversification and unification

In human-centered design, the center or lens of "business viability" seeks to understand what is needed for a sustainable business model that is accessible to diverse communities.

In our analysis of participant responses, with this factor we identified that what is needed is for support services and other voices in arts and culture to **galvanize and organize communities to work together in the digital sphere in a more coordinated manner**.



Diversification looks beyond traditional models, funding sources, and community networks to reduce an over-reliance on a single source of dependency with strengthening support for a more diverse arts ecosystem.

Unification includes the pooling of resources, knowledge, and capabilities to benefit the whole arts ecology and beyond while prioritizing the voices of under-served equity-seeking groups.

Adopt a social-technical approach

In human-centered design, the center or lens of "tech feasibility" seeks to understand what is needed to develop maintainable, scalable technical infrastructure, and whether the specific know how, skills, resources, and technologies required for the solution to succeed are feasible.

Through our analysis of participant responses and other dialogues in the wider ecosystem, what we identified with this factor is to **foster a social-technical approach that places equal priority on both social and technical aspects of a solution or ecology as interdependent parts of a complex whole.**

A social-technical approach includes balanced consideration of requirements for hardware, software, individual, community, and other complex-social technical structures and roles to help inform the design of inclusive and accessible systems that involve diverse communities of people and technology. ([Interaction Design Foundation](#))

