

# Embracing Diversity for a Fertile World

## What can we, leaders in change, learn from a chicken?



BY GRIET BOUWEN

At the opening session of the WAIC 2012, the room was suddenly filled with images and stories of chickens. Artist Koen Vanmechelen of Belgium took us on a trip through the history of this domesticated bird. A surprised audience became aware of the power of this metaphor for our thinking about creating a thriving future. It's all about diversity, says Koen. Life can only flourish when we purposely bring differences together.

**D**id you know the chicken once only lived in Nepal, at the feet of the Himalaya? From there, all the chickens came out, spreading their genes all over the world. People in different countries manipulated the breeding of this animal, cultivating different varieties.

Koen became interested in cross-breeding these different varieties, intrigued by the question, 'What would emerge in the fusion of differences?' After several generations of cross-bred birds, he noticed that the chickens again started sharing common characteristics. The original genes seemed to return, not only on the surface, but also within the body of the chickens. Koen also argues that the cross-breeding brings fertility, while in-breeding leads to infertility. The cross-bred chickens also are stronger than the original species; they have much better immunity.

In a talk with Peter Pula, CEO of the Canadian Axiom News, Koen explained the inherent message of his work a bit further. First, the question of mankind came up: What came first, the chicken or the egg? Without any hesitation, Koen made it clear: it was both the chicken and the egg.

### Duality is life, life is duality

His conclusions can be highly inspirational for change leaders these days. 'If you abuse an organism, it will come back to you in one way or another,' he says. 'We have to make partnerships. Every organism is looking for another organism to survive. If you are open for diversity, you can bring the best of differences together.'



Graphic Diana Arsenian



Koen Vanmechelen & Peter Pula

## Change can start when we pick up the signals that something is ready to move

The signals come to us in different disguises. ‘There is so much more than speaking and writing,’ says Koen. Some people can say a lot more in a sculpture, for example. A sculpture even asks you what it can tell you. In looking for the answer on this provocative question, a lot of stories can come up. Are you open enough for these stories to reach you? What question can we ask ourselves, as facilitators of strengths-based change, for our work in society? If every evolution is coming from combinations of differences, do we dare to release our need for consensus and compromise? Do we as AI practitioners have the courage to intentionally and definitely go out to other environments, provoking confrontations between completely different perspectives? Can you tolerate and even celebrate the diversity? What could be a next step you could take in bringing different perspectives together?

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[link to the videostream](#) 

Talking about the power of metaphors and arts, it seems like the AI practices nowadays become enriched with this perspective. At the WAIC 2012, participants could discover creative methodologies based on other ways of expressing ourselves. Let's look into some examples.

-  Figuring Futures, the art of (re)framing challenges creatively. By Elke Gybels.
-  Appreciative Inquiring Craftmanship, by dancing tango. By Stefaan Devogelaere.
-  An enormous dream catcher welcomed the participants to the conference. Listen to the story of Kristel Franssen, maker of this piece of art.
-  Fascinating rhythms creating community connections through drumming with an appreciative twist. In this workshop Julie Barnes and Steve Ball created a new connecting language. See how they took over the conference hall in this movie.
-  About improvisation and Appreciative Inquiry, Nathalie Van Rentergem (Inspirazie) hosted a workshop. She wrote a blog on her experiences, which you can read here.