



Q&A with EBN Congress speaker Dr Richard Florida



[Dr Richard Florida](#), the Cultural Innovation keynote speaker at [EBN Congress](#), answers some questions ahead of his address at the Congress on [May 30](#). (First appeared in [Ulster Business magazine](#))

The theme of your lecture at the EBN conference is “cultural innovation” – how do you define cultural innovation?

For me, cultural innovation is the constant improvement and refinement of the way we approach business, arts, creativity and our everyday lives. Whether through technology or the improvement of how we tap into the creativity of our citizens, cultural innovation is a process that is constantly repeating and refining over and over.

Is cultural innovation an organic phenomenon or can it be planned?

Cultural innovation can be both. But most importantly it requires tapping into the creativity of everyone. Just as I wrote in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, I still believe every single human being is creativity. To improve our cities, organizations, we have tap into the creativity everyone. This has to be the single point of focus for all efforts. For the first time in human history, the basic logic of improving our economy and driving business innovation requires the further development and use of human creative capabilities. The great challenge of our time is to find ways to tap into every human's creativity.

Is there evidence to suggest common traits or attitudes in the most innovative companies, cities or wider economies?

Sure. The most innovative companies do three things to help drive innovation and creativity. First, innovative companies eliminate the distractions for their creative workers; this allows employees to remain fully engaged in their work. Second, innovative companies take an active role to help spark creativity of their workers. This includes developing authentic work environment and spaces that help to engage creative workers. Finally, *Creativity is embedded in relationships*, and it thrives among people who have worked together a long time. This is why the most innovative companies engage creative workers as invested equals in the company's future.

What would be your message to a city like Derry~Londonderry, which is struggling with one of the highest unemployment rates in the region but aspires to become a hub for creative, digital and hi-tech industries? How best could it achieve that goal?

It goes back to the 3-T's of economic development: *Talent, Technology, and Tolerance* The 3T's approach represents a comprehensive strategy for cities like to compete and prosper in the creative age.

Talent: The driving force behind any effective economic strategy is talented people. We live in a more mobile age than ever before. People, especially top creative talent, move around a lot. A community's ability to attract and retain top talent is the defining issue of the creative age.

Technology: Technology and innovation are critical components of a community or organization's ability to drive economic growth. To be successful, communities and organizations must have the avenues for transferring research, ideas, and innovation into marketable and sustainable products. Universities are paramount to this, and provide a key hub institution of the creative age.

Tolerance: Economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities, organizations, and peers that are open to new ideas and different people. Places receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles, and new views on social status and power structures will benefit significantly in the creative age.

Should manufacturing be a core part of the future strategy for the prosperity of Western economies such as the UK / Ireland?

Economies should always be diversified. This includes a focus on creating, upgrading and supporting industries across all three sectors of the economy: creative, service and working. In regards to manufacturing, we should absolutely be focusing on the cross section of creativity, manufacturing and innovation. This can happen in high-tech manufacturing. That said, high-tech manufacturing can help drive economic growth but it does not necessarily drive job growth because many of those jobs can be automated and driven by technology

Based on your Creative Class theories, are the prospects for Ireland and/or Northern Ireland good, bad or uncertain?

Future prospects are good. The economic down turn has dramatically impacted reshaped our economic geography. Places with diversified economies and high concentrations of highly educated people and those that work in the “creative class” have done much better in weathering the current economic storm. Ireland has a large creative class – more the 39% of the workforce. The key will be continuing to focus on nurturing creative industries and building cities and communities that are authentic and provide a high quality of life.