cultural
leadership
programme

A cultural
leadership
reader

Edited by Sue Kay and Katie Venner,
with Susanne Burns and Mary Schwarz

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Forewords

Hilary S. Carty
Director, Cultural Leadership Programme

When approached to support *A cultural leadership reader* by Katie Venner, Sue Kay and Susanne Burns, we felt that there was real timeliness in their proposal. Thinking about cultural leadership had moved from the responsiveness of pure delivery into a wider reflective debate about what leaders and leadership could, and should, look like for the cultural and creative industries and beyond.

As we hope you will see within the range of articles, the intellectual capital, the history of practice and the development of thinking has provided an important critical mass and great creative stimulus to support and understand the shaping of leadership.

Very much like the sector itself, these pages offer an eclectic range of views – a leadership prism, colourful and dynamic in its opinions and approaches. So whilst some leaders highlight collaboration, relationships, partnership and distributed leadership; others tease out ambiguity, resilience, self-organisation and risk. Add in the call for innovation, enterprise, creativity and authenticity and this begins to look like a sector I recognise – in all its complexity.

A cultural leadership reader provides a companion on the leadership journey – a provocation to lead and lead well. It acts as a reference point and critical friend that both supports and challenges, encouraging the next step, the deeper reflection, the better outcomes. We hope that leaders, however defined, will see something of themselves within this reader – and will continue to contribute to the dynamic leadership practice and thinking that informs the way we work.

David Jubb
Joint Artistic Director, Battersea Arts Centre

It is a pleasure to write a foreword for this cultural leadership reader. But I probably shouldn't be writing it. I have not read widely on the subject, I have not been on a cultural leadership course and I am definitely not a cultural leadership expert. I am a foreword fraud. In fact you might do well to skip this. Why not check out the contents page? You might see someone you have heard of who can make a more qualified contribution…

That's better. Hopefully we have got rid of a hatful of experts who have gone off to seek a more expert opinion. Don't misunderstand me: I love expertise. I will proudly wear an anorak in pursuit of knowledge. But I mistrust consultant culture. I can't bear impenetrable language that creates walls around information. I love people who embrace the fact we can all understand, given the right words. I love people who are prepared to take risks and put their own necks on the line. Like the people who have made contributions to this reader: people who get stuck in.

Cultural leadership sounds oddly bureaucratic and even though I am charged to write a foreword about it, I cannot bring myself to define something that sets my jargon antenna jittering. So instead, I'd like to tell you a story. It is a story that's intended to offer a provocation for leadership in the arts in the 21st century.

Imagine that every year of your life you have climbed 430 feet to exactly the same spot on Shooter's Hill in Greenwich and you have taken a picture of London. Imagine creating a one minute film of all your pictures. Now press play. The transformation of London's skyline from the early Middle Ages to 2010 says a lot about leadership and power in the second millennia. The skyline demonstrates how our resources have transferred from agriculturalists to the church, to royals, to governments, to industrialists and now to modern companies. The story is similar across most urban and rural landscapes. Rewind and watch the last 10 seconds of your film again: witness the revolution

of our current oil age. A population explosion has fuelled the creation of giant corporate temples, colossal shrines to capitalism that have sped past church spires, making it abundantly clear who is in charge. Created by the leaders of today's corporations they are manifestations of our progress and success. But it is sobering to think how many of these buildings are dysfunctional: architecturally and managerially. They are hierarchical. They segregate their users, encouraging territorialism instead of enabling congregation and collaboration. They are modern day mirrored temples that make the outside world less important for those inside. These glass boxes, intended as transparent paragons of incorruptibility, have turned out to be Pandora's boxes containing all kinds of self-indulgence. It has become clear from what's happened over the last couple of years that many of our leaders, especially in finance and politics, are in danger of losing touch with reality.

So what kind of leaders do we want in the cultural sector? What does success look like for culture in the 21st century? What is our vision for the future? I would like to offer three ideas based around a single provocation. We have enough buildings, enough empires and enough temples reaching for the sky. Instead of isolated towers of Babel we could use culture to create swings, rope ladders, pathways, slides, tunnels and tightropes to connect our skyline. With this image in mind, my three thoughts are as follows.

First, great leaders could lean out of their windows and use artists and audiences to connect different sectors and spaces. We could embrace a wider definition of culture and understand that our future depends on every individual accessing and applying their own creativity. Leaders of arts organisations could show the way by getting their collaborative act together. We could start by co-developing or co-presenting work, sharing infrastructure and connecting our ideas and audiences. I'm not suggesting collaborative leadership is easy. After four years as Artistic Director of Battersea Arts Centre, I invited David Micklem to join me as Joint Artistic Director. Since then I have had the most exciting period of my working

life. But it has not been without challenge for both of us: collaboration asks us difficult questions. But we think we are better at what we do because of our creative partnership. We shall now see how collaboration works in modern UK politics.

Second, our leaders could look to re-use, re-imagine, adapt and explore our current buildings rather than try to create new ones. At the peak of our oil use, our world is changing more rapidly than we can probably control. Not just in terms of climate but also socially, fiscally and culturally. We could find new ways of being resilient with what we have. Artists are brilliantly positioned to lead us in this pursuit, helping us access our creativity to imagine new ways of living well together. Third, as we develop our leadership skills as a sector, let's avoid adopting a corporate language that can only be understood by people in the membership club. Artists are great at ringing alarm bells when it comes to jargon, rhetoric and dogma. We could all learn that skill.

The actor Toby Jones said to me that the older people get, the less they want to find out about new stuff and the more they want to focus on the stuff they know. Particularly men. When you realise that today's leaders in many sectors tend to be older men, you start to understand why we are led in such linear ways. We need leaders who are interested in finding out about what they don't know. We would do well to look to young leaders who have grown up using the internet and who are adopting some of the internet's self-organising, knowledge-hungry principles.

In conclusion, the greatest asset of the cultural sector is its artists. As we seek to develop our leadership abilities for the 21st century, we must not do this at the cost of artists playing a leading role in every area of the cultural landscape. Great leaders will always ensure that artists are employed in leading roles, something which wider society could embrace to catalyse real change. We need leaders for the cultural sector who are collaborative by nature, who speak a language that everyone can understand and who place artists and audiences at the heart of everything they do.

01 A cultural leadership reader: introduction

Katie Venner
Katie Venner is one of the co-editiors of *A cultural leadership reader.*

Katie has worked in arts organisations, local authorities and with Arts Council England. She has a Masters in Change Agent Skills and Strategies from University of Surrey, and is currently an independent facilitator working with clients on organisational change, leadership development and action learning.

Theory and Practice

People who see the word in terms of theories often have a very intricate view of what is happening. Clarity is difficult for them. They are very hard to work with.

If you teach a group by making complex explanations, you will confuse people. They will take notes and fill their minds with opinions. But if you return again and again to an awareness of what is actually happening, you will both clarify and enlighten.

(from Heider's *Tao of Leadership*, 1985)

Why a reader?

As a sector we have an acknowledged preference for learning on the job – experience is what counts. So it's not surprising that we also tend to regard theories of management and leadership with caution. In spite of the hundreds of books on leadership published every year, very little has been written on leadership in the cultural and creative sector; we just tend to get on with it. Many practitioners talk about 'making it up as they go along', and anyway, what use is a theory borrowed from commerce or industry?

The idea for this reader came from our growing awareness that this scenario was changing. Cultural leadership development initiatives led by the Clore Foundation and the Cultural Leadership Programme, by universities and independent training providers, often with generous funding from government, have stimulated demand for learning. As a result, a growing number of practitioners have, individually and as groups of learners, been reflecting on what they do as managers and leaders. They have been asking questions of the models and theories of leadership and management: how do they fit our sector? What's useful – what's not? And practitioners have noticed the absence of literature that speaks directly to them of *their* experience of leadership. A literature on cultural leadership is emerging,

but it exists in the main in occasional articles, practitioners' private journals and academic essays.

This reader sets out to make some of that work more 'visible', with the aim of generating interest in developing a leadership literature that reflects our concerns, ambitions and learning as a sector. It also makes a contribution to meeting the needs of practitioners on leadership development programmes, or those conducting their own independent inquiry, who ask, 'What should I read?'

How to use this reader

The reader is a resource you will probably want to dip into rather than read cover to cover.

At the front you will find a commentary that sets the context for leadership and leadership development in the sector and reflects on all the contributions, identifying themes that help us organise and make sense of how we think about cultural leadership. While reference is made to all of the contributions, some articles are only available in the online version. To read the reader in its entirety you are directed to www.creative-choices.co.uk/reader

There is also a review of the **leadership literature** that provides a starting point for the practitioner interested in how academics and management thinkers have constructed and talk about leadership.

If you go to the websites mentioned above, you will be able to recommend books that have meant something to you and that you'd want to suggest others read. We hope that this will grow into a resource that will signpost useful texts and ideas, and also encourage the practice of critiquing what we are offered as models and theories of cultural leadership.

Inviting contributions

Using the networks of the leadership programmes and other professional and sector networks, we invited practitioners to write about their experiences of leadership within the cultural sector. We recognised that there are many ways of exercising, experiencing and indeed 'writing' cultural leadership and we were just as keen to hear from people whose stories might not have reached the limelight. Thinking about how people had learned to lead, we asked people about books or experiences that had helped inform their leadership practice. We also asked a small number of academics to offer their reflections on cultural leadership. We wanted a range of different voices and perspectives, from various points along the theory/practice continuum. We hoped that this approach might paint a picture of the state of cultural leadership practice from which we could all learn. The contributions we received exceeded our expectations in number, depth and range. The picture is vivid, if partial. We recognise that there are many more voices to hear.

Reflecting on practice

Donald Schön talks about 'professional artistry' (1983). His study of how professionals enhance their practice while they engage in it gave us the notion of the 'reflective practitioner'. What he means by professional artistry is how professionals deal with unique situations, unanticipated events, the 'stuff that happens' every day that can't be taught. In thinking about leadership development, it's worth remembering just how much can't 'be taught', but is experienced. If we are curious about cultural leadership we need to take time to stop and look at *what we are doing*, sharing our observations with each other to build a body of understanding to which we can all add, and which benefits the wider field of players and practice. In our view, writing about our experiences of leadership, and inviting others to do the same, helps build a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), a wide group of practitioners who appreciate how, by critically

reflecting on *how we are leading* (including asking difficult questions), all of us working in the sector will be better able to exercise leadership as and when the occasion arises.

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...writing about our experiences of leadership, and inviting others to do the same, helps build a community of practice

02 Scratching the seven year itch: a commentary

Sue Kay
Sue Kay is one of the co-editors of *A cultural leadership reader*.

Sue has worked in the cultural sector for over 25 years, within arts organisations, funding bodies, development agencies and higher education. Now a freelance consultant and trainer, she is researching cultural leadership for a PhD at the University of Exeter.

This commentary charts a tentative course through the leadership and leadership development perspectives brought together in this print and web reader from practitioners and researchers working across the arts and heritage domains. It identifies themes, highlights preoccupations and celebrates the rich mix of doing, reflecting and writing that now clusters under the heading 'cultural leadership', seven years on…

Please note: This commentary features articles appearing in both the print and web reader. To access the full collection, go to www.creative-choices.co.uk/reader

Introduction

From early 2003, following the publication of a task force report to the trustees of the Clore Duffield Foundation (Hewison and Holden, 2002), 'cultural leadership' entered our lexicon. Since then, the issue of leadership in and of cultural sector organisations and practices has attracted considerable attention within the UK's subsidised arts and heritage domains and the creative industries. We have seen the establishment of the Clore Leadership Programme, the roll out of an ongoing research project under the Mission Models Money umbrella, the advent of new postgraduate courses at several of our universities, and in 2006, the launch of the national Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP). Funded initially by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, to 'hone the leadership skills of talented high flyers in cultural organisations… [and to] promote the emergence of a more diverse group of cultural leaders' (Arts Council England, 2006: 5), CLP was granted further resourcing (2008/11) to:

promote excellence in leadership across the creative and cultural industries by supporting an ambitious range of activities, opportunities and resources…to nurture and develop emerging to established world class, dynamic and diverse leaders for the 21st century. (www.culturalleadership.org.uk)

Within a short space of time (2003-10) then, cultural leadership has become a significant focus for policy intervention and government spending (Arts Council England, 2006; Devlin et al., 2008). By extension, as several thousand of us have now experienced and delivered the resultant (and ongoing) array of exploratory opportunities and leadership development initiatives, it has also generated discussion about the role and function of cultural managers, cultural organisations and the sector as a whole.

As deliverers and participants ourselves, it seemed to us that now was a good time to pause and consider how thinking and doing around cultural leadership might have evolved over that period; to generate a seven year itch and then scratch it. We felt there was a need for a publication that spoke directly about the *experience* of cultural leadership, to sit alongside the think pieces and workforce intelligence that have been gathered along the way (for example into women and leadership and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) leadership in the cultural and creative industries – see www.culturalleadership.org.uk/publications-and-research). And while our approach to this story collection could not be described as scientific or comprehensive (our contributors comprising a comparatively small sample), we did follow some strong hunches, namely that:

This reader is a start and not an end point

- there are interesting stories out there which might not be located in the most obvious places
- putting academic and practitioner viewpoints alongside each other might yield a stimulating mix
- an incursion into how we are reflecting on the practice of cultural leadership might bring some important issues, themes and gaps to the fore, the better to enable us to critique what has happened and inform what next

From the start, however, we were acutely aware that we are not alone:

> The hunger and quest for leadership knowledge appears to be insatiable. Typing into the Google search engine on January 15, 2007, we noted more than 257,000,000 entries when we typed in the word 'leader' and more than 168,000,000 for the word 'leadership'… [In addition,] an estimated $36 to $60 billion US dollars are expended annually on management and leadership development throughout the world… (Jackson and Parry, 2008:9).

Leadership, many believe, 'holds the answer not only to the success of individuals and organisations, but also to sectors, regions and nations' (Bolden, 2007: 4). In our globalised, fast changing world, the quest for leadership has been likened to a search for the Holy Grail (Pye, 2005: 31). And yet what it is and how we might define it remain a bit of a mystery. Some maintain that 'like beauty, you will know leadership when you see it' (Western, 2008: 23) while others have concluded (Stogdill, 1974: 259) that there are 'almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept'. And that's before we even get to what we might mean by *cultural* leadership.

While all our contributors offer their take on it – either directly or implicitly – we have neither proceeded from, nor arrived at, a definition. Instead, we have configured 'cultural leadership' as something we 'construct' as we do, read, write and reflect on the range of things we choose, and are encouraged to group, under that banner. This is our editorial 'lens', if you like. So rather than asking,

'What *is* cultural leadership?' our focus is closer to 'How do we *talk* about cultural leadership (and for what purposes), *who* is doing the talking (and who is not) and what does such talk *bring into view*?' In short, we are interested in 'cultural leadership' as discourse.

Strands of talk

If we apply this lens to the pieces collected here, we can 'see' that the ways in which we might view, talk about and 'construct' cultural leadership appear to be changing over time.

Around the turn of the millennium, a series of crises in national flagship institutions (the Royal Opera House, the Royal Shakespeare Company, English National Opera and the British Museum), difficulties in recruiting to senior positions and a number of critical reports (Holland et al., 1997; Boyden Associates, 2000; Metier, 2000; Resource, 2001), led to the conclusion that there was a '**crisis** of cultural leadership [across our sector]' (Hewison and Holden, 2002), characterised by apathy and a general lack of aspiration. This was 'explained in terms of low morale produced by government underfunding, low pay, loss of status, ill-defined career paths and over-regulation…' and compounded by 'the collapse of a hierarchic model of cultural values' (Hewison, 2004: 164). Such apparent 'crisis' – subsequently reconfigured as a 'serious gap in current provision for developing our current and future leaders' (Arts Council England, 2006: 8) – was also mirrored in concerns about leadership quality across the public and private sectors as a whole, and reflected in a number of concurrent reports (Institute of Management/Demos, 2001; DfES, 2002).

In addition, there was – and still is – talk of the need to improve our management and leadership skills in order to strengthen the contribution of the creative and cultural industries to the national **economy**, and to prepare for an anticipated growth in the sector's workforce.

Issues surrounding management and leadership are considered vital across all of the creative and

cultural industries. In many cases, there is no shortage of individuals with drive and creative talent. There is however, a lack of understanding surrounding the need for strong management and leadership skills, particularly in small organisations (www.ccskills.org.uk)

Even more impetus has been added as a result of the economic downturn, which simultaneously puts the sector at particular *risk* 'because it creates wealth from ideas and newness rather than pledgeable assets and well tried formulas' and, it is asserted, sets it in pole position to help create the necessary *new paradigm* 'that [will] carry us from our current malaise to a solid and sustainable prosperity' (Holden et al., 2009).

Finally, the leadership challenges of significant **cultural change** have begun to weave between these first two strands of talk, catapulting issues of cultural leadership into a much bigger arena of debate.

> We are living through a time of fundamental cultural transformation. Familiar cultural and social norms are in flux. This is not only an age of change but a change of age… In order to thrive in this challenging environment, we need to develop a higher tolerance for complexity, uncertainty and not knowing… The most promising settings to gain such experience are in the arts and cultural sector. Today's creative adhocracies are loose, flexible, adaptive organisational forms suited to the complex operating environment. They are nurturing the midwives of the new culture (Leicester, 2007: 3).

This cultural change comprises many aspects, including:

- the creative and collaborative potential of digital technology
- the shift from *provision of* culture to *participation in* and making of culture – the art of 'with' rather than 'to' or 'for' (Leadbeater, 2009)
- the importance of 'personalisation' – the desire for consumers 'to tailor their experience and co-produce creative products' (Knell, 2006: 9)
- the impact of globalisation on our sense of self and community, and

- the emergence of migration, global recession and climate change as the overarching issues of our times

These, it is argued, call into question (Holden, 2006; Hewison, 2006; Leadbeater, 2009; Jones, 2009):

- the role of cultural institutions
- established cultural practices
- traditional notions of authority and expertise
- closed, top-down models of organisation
- the adequacy of the language we use to encapsulate 21st century cultural value, and
- the purpose of public funding for culture

Furthermore, it is suggested that in this new 'taking part' world, cultural leadership is not only about the stewardship of practices, organisations or domains, it is also about advocating for a 'vibrant expressive life' as a public good within a democracy (Ivey, 2009), with radical implications for cultural policy formation. As set out in another CLP publication:

> Cultural leadership now occupies a terrain that helps bring about the marriage of cultural and political change (Palmer, in Khan, 2009: 6).

Themes

Several contributors to this reader focus on one or more of the **'crisis'**, **'economy'** and **'cultural change'** strands of talk. Graham Leicester revisits his influential 2007 essay *Rising to the Occasion: Cultural Leadership in Powerful Times*, and challenges the sector to '(re)frame cultural leadership as creative transgression of the dominant culture, rather than helping the existing culture to become more effective or productive.' He further contends that 'the '21st century competencies' required for such leadership are readily available… [and] can be [further] developed through… social learning'. John Holden explores what the values of a post-recession age might be and their implications for cultural leadership and organisation, while Pauline Beaumont considers the need for a different sort of leadership

As deliverers and participants ourselves, it seemed to us that now was a good time to pause and consider how thinking and doing might have evolved over that period; to generate a seven year itch and then scratch it

to match the public funding famine we are likely to experience in the years ahead. Nicola Jennings and Holly Jones make the case for a new model of cultural leadership fit for a 'taking part' society and based on the principles of dynamic engagement. And Clore Fellow Ben Payne tells a story of leadership discovery through crisis, both personal and global.

Other writers raise issues of **diversity and voice**, challenging leadership inequalities both within and outside the cultural sector. Donna Ladkin considers how organisations might increase female representation at senior level. Rejecting the solution of women-only training, she argues that management teams should work on the 'aesthetic' they create through their habitual ways of interacting and the extent to which it includes or alienates. Jenny Williams examines Black leadership in the cultural sector through the lens of race equality. Drawing on Toni Morrison's notion of 'the white gaze', she proposes that transformational change must begin with personal stories that collectively describe and make visible the experience of inequality. And as a self-confessed introvert, a disabled person, and someone with over 15 years experience in senior roles, Moya Harris argues that the 'heroic', extrovert leader is over-rated and the particular qualities introverts bring to the cultural leadership landscape deserve greater recognition.

The interplay between **leader development** ('which is about developing individuals in leadership roles' Bolden, 2007: 5) and **leadership development** ('which takes a more relational view of leadership as a process involving everyone within the organisation' *Ibid.*) is also an area of interest. Roy Clare favours the working mechanism of a three dimensional matrix, 'where relationships are nourished vertically, horizontally and diagonally' in order to develop leadership at every level. Madeline Hutchins believes that 'superior performance' depends on more than skills development and argues for an 'open minded' approach to issues of structure and organisation. Caroline Norbury makes the case for an 'authentic and moral' approach to leadership that puts the relationship between leader and followers at its heart.

Inspired by the photographic work featured on

page 59, Sarah Weir gives a no-holds barred account of her own **leadership learning**, complete with 'small corrections' and 'handbrake turns' along the way. She offers hints and pointers with resonance for novice and seasoned traveller alike. Deborah Barnard, Kate Sanderson and Becky Swain explore coaching in three dimensions: as a framework for thinking about leadership, a key leadership skill, and a way of developing new working cultures. Andy Christian sets out several leadership lessons from many years experience in business, education and in the craft and design sector. Dawn Langley questions some of the assumptions underlying leadership development and advocates for an approach which 'exposes the ambiguities, tensions, inequalities and contradictions in the business of leadership'.

Several writers make creative use of **external theories and ideas** to explore aspects of cultural leadership. Jigisha Patel delves into contemporary thinking on ethics to guide her investigation of the decisions and challenges that cultural leaders face on a day to day basis. Susanne Burns believes that systems thinking can be helpful when considering the inner workings of our organisations and the role of cultural leadership in society at large. Tony Butler tells how ideas around asset based community development helped him transform the Museum of East Anglian Life into a cultural organisation with 'happiness' at its core. Laylah Pyke finds writing on emotional intelligence particularly useful when devising effective ways of leading through networks, partnerships and matrix teams. Chrissie Godfrey draws on theories of complexity and change to inform her five simple guidelines to help cultural leaders embrace the uncertainty of our times *and* hang onto a sense of authenticity and self. Finally, Susanne Burns and Kerry Wilson provide an overview of the existing array of leadership literature, using the perspectives of academic, practitioner and learner.

The importance of **identity and context** to our understanding of what it means to be a leader or to experience leadership is revealed in a number of personal testimonies. Michael Day tells of a six year 'identity project' that became the primary driver for wholesale strategic, structural and cultural change within the Historic Royal Palaces. Polly Hamilton

lays down the gauntlet to anyone perceiving local government 'as the place of last resort... a refuge for the dull, the bean counter and the jobsworth', highlighting instead the crucial leadership role of 'those who make paths'. From the perspective of a freelance museums and galleries consultant, Anne Murch examines the intricacies of leading in partnerships and collaborations. Pauline Tambling, after 25 years as a practitioner and policy maker in the subsidised sector, wrestles with the challenge of setting up a new organisation (a National Skills Academy) in the middle of a recession. Tony Heaton – who operates in the 'parallel worlds of organisational leader and sculptor' – talks of 'leadership by accident not design' and motivation through 'oppression, discrimination and the refusal to travel third class.'

And, a focus on **'homegrown' leadership and cultural practices** completes the mix. Diane Parker explores how improvisation can help us develop creativity, curiosity, flexibility, resilience and 'mindfulness' in our leadership behaviours. Janet Summerton takes issue with the assumption that theory generated elsewhere is superior to our own. She also proposes that through collecting 'wisdom' from our sector and keeping up to date with understandings of professional learning, we can create ever more effective cultural leadership development activities.

What might all this suggest, then, about how this group of practitioners and researchers is reflecting on and 'writing' cultural leadership?

Using our lens again and viewing the pieces together, it is interesting to note the absence of 'deficit' talk in favour of something more positive and assertive. In addition, there appears to be a discernible shift away from the idea that addressing issues of leadership is simply a question of 'fixing' the perceived skills or knowledge shortcomings of individual leaders.

Second, even though the majority of contributions are written within the established conversational 'tripod' of 'leaders, followers and common goals', (Bennis, 2007: 3; Drath et al., 2008: 635), there appears

to be little or no fear of questioning prevailing assumptions about leadership or bringing personal, external or practice-based perspectives to bear. There is some adventurous 'bricolage' or DIY going on.

Third, the collection as a whole – alongside people's readiness to contribute – seems to indicate a keenness to reflect *in* and *on* both leadership and learning, together with a desire to pause and share diverse viewpoints and practices. This is significant when we consider the enduring tendency within our sector 'to set the pace of things too fast to have time for the thinking as well as the doing' (Summerton et al., 2006: 6-7), where 'busyness' can mean we do not always draw back sufficiently to reflect and extract all the possible learning from our experiences, particularly through 'developmental talk' or talk that 'leads to learning, which leads to development' (Dixon, 1998: 10).

In a 2007 article, leadership academic Keith Grint makes some observations which resonate here.

> If we assume from the beginning that individual leaders are responsible for success and failure then we inhibit our ability to look more generally at the whole organization – including the political and economic environment – to establish cause and effect... we need to understand how *leadership* works *in* organizations rather than how *leaders* work *on* organizations... We also need to recognise that learning to lead is itself a social process rather than an individual event... and that the learning of leadership may be, as Aristotle implied, not just learning a body of theoretical knowledge – *episteme* – and not merely captured by replicable skills – *techne* – but rather something including practical wisdom – *phronesis* (Grint, 2007: 233).

For Grint, 'practical wisdom' is indeterminate because it is exercised in a world of 'uncertainty and ambiguity'. It is concerned with establishing the collective 'good' in a particular context and situation and 'stitching together whatever is at hand... to ensure practical success.' It is also about addressing 'four elemental questions:

Experience and reflection are marbled through the talk in this collection

- Where are we going?
- Is this desirable?
- What should be done?
- Who gains and who loses?' (Op cit: 237)

The implication is that 'leadership cannot be achieved simply through... greater knowledge and skills for all those involved ... it [also] require[s] greater *wisdom*... something only achieved through experience and... reflection' (Op cit: 242).

Experience and reflection are marbled through the talk in this collection. We thank our contributors for sharing some of their wisdom and letting us stitch it together into something we hope is itchy enough to be a good read.

Finally, it is important to stress that this reader is a start and not an end point.' It reflects the voices of some and inevitably not of others, so there are gaps to fill, new and different perspectives to explore and lots more conversations to be had. We hope we've set something interesting in train though, and – mindful that 'cultural leadership' is an ongoing 'construction' – resisted the temptation to turn 'a scribble into a recognisable object too soon' (Phillips, 1997: 96-97). We look forward to further and more diverse reflection – and writing – over the *next* seven years.

Note: To access the full collection of articles featured in this commentary, go to www.ccskills.org.uk.

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03 Real cultural leadership: leading the culture in a time of cultural crisis

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In today's challenging times we need a more expansive understanding of cultural leadership that is less about leading cultural institutions more effectively and more about leading the culture. This is a vital task at a time of cultural crisis and global confusion. The arts and cultural sector are well placed to lead the way – but only if they can frame cultural leadership as creative transgression of the dominant culture, rather than helping the existing culture to become more effective or productive. The '21st century competencies' **required for such leadership are readily available. They can be developed through experience, in an explicit programme of social learning. This is likely to be easier and cheaper than existing views of cultural leadership development imagine.**

Hold tight, hold tight, we must insist that the world is what we have always taken it to be.

(Chorus, in T. S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion*, 1939)

In 2002 Jake Chapman, an expert in energy systems, wrote a short Demos pamphlet on the case for systems thinking in government. It argued that in addressing complicated issues of policy we need to consider things not just in isolation, or in simple linear cause and effect relationships, but in more complex patterns of inter-relationship and feedback: systems. This was not an original thesis, nor a particularly remarkable one. But the pamphlet was a roaring success.

Two years later Chapman was prevailed upon to write the foreword for a second edition. He noted that when he had first written the pamphlet he had known a lot about systems thinking but not much about government. Two years later he had been invited into numerous departments, helped out with many projects, run training workshops and reviews of all kinds. As a result, he wrote, 'I have concluded that making the changes suggested in the book is more difficult and more urgent than I previously realised'. He could write exactly the same thing today.

I have something of the same feeling in returning to the theme of cultural leadership for the first time since I published a short essay *Rising to the Occasion: Cultural Leadership in Powerful*

Times for the Mission Money Models programme in 2007. That essay has gone down very well, both within and beyond the UK, and as a contribution to debates beyond the arts and cultural sector (e.g. education, management, mental health). It has sparked all kinds of interesting conversations, brought me into contact with some truly remarkable and inspiring people, and opened up a whole field of collaborative relationships working new ground around the themes of 'leadership' and 'organisation' (both of which terms now start to feel like legacy language from another era – hence the inverted commas).

The essay played well in the arts sector too. Partly because it suggested the sector is best placed to provide settings in which to develop the ways of being, the ways of doing and the ways of organising needed to thrive in the 21st century – better placed than business, better than the public sector, better than formal education and training. It pointed to a hidden resource that every sector now needs (in my view) – the capacity to thrive on complexity and partial or provisional understanding – in the development of which the arts and cultural sector has stolen a march. This is a potent theme of the moment.

I am also starting to see a greater interest in 'culture' more generally amongst policy makers. Following Chapman, they have been encouraged to see difficult problems not in isolation but as emergent properties of a 'whole system'. And for

some that 'whole system' is becoming discernable as a culture – in the anthropological sense that Clifford Geertz (1973) and others use the term: the patterns of shared experience that shape (and are shaped by) our lives. This way of thinking is starting to spark a curious interest in policy circles in artistic and cultural practice as a source of inspiration and novel approaches to social issues. I detect an unexpressed yearning for cultural leadership.

Yet when I am invited to discuss cultural leadership within the sector itself, for example in the design of various cultural leadership initiatives, I have found this broad interpretation of the term too far from current practice to gain much traction. The default understanding is still about leading successful arts and cultural organisations. Beyond the sector I find more interest in a broader framing: leading the culture. This I believe represents the growing edge of cultural leadership, and the greatest opportunity. But it will take an act of cultural leadership itself to realise this perspective in practice. I hope that the essays in this volume will further encourage those of us who are up for the struggle.

21st century cultural leadership

In making the case for this broader view, I would like to stress three elements – each of which is elaborated further below. First, we are living in powerful times. They are making stark demands on us all and leaving most of us 'in over our heads'. The loss of familiar and reliable cultural norms, institutions and structures of social identity threatens to overwhelm us and fuels anxiety.

The most common defence is neurotic – deny the uncertainty and reinforce the familiar, shut out and even demonise the unknown, resist. The second defence is psychotic – tune out, get lost in fear and rage, eat, drink and be merry, collapse. Both of these responses add to the febrile nature of the times.

Second, these behaviours can be seen as both symptoms and causes of what is in effect a cultural crisis. And a cultural crisis requires a cultural

response. It requires real cultural leadership, fashioning a new coherence that creates patterns of shared experience that enable us to thrive in the new conditions of the 21st century. This requires a courageous step beyond our neurotic and psychotic defences into growth and transformation.

Third, the capacity to rise above our circumstances in this way, to be a reflective actor rather than an overwhelmed victim, is in my view one of the fundamental '21st century competencies'[1]. These competencies do not have to be taught. They are innate. And they are relational, inevitably developed in company with other people. They are better evoked in some settings than in others. IFF's experience shadowing a number of chief executives, for example, reveals just how constraining an environment the corporation, the public sector agency and other organisational settings can be for the expression of people's full selves. We have also witnessed the tension that can result from developing people without developing their work setting (the organisation, its working environment and relationships) at the same time. The 21st century competencies can be a source of frustration in 20th century organisations. Hence a capacity for cultural leadership, shifting the culture, must be part and parcel of personal development.

1 I know the term '21st century competencies' begs a lot of questions – which is one of the reasons why I am writing a book with Maureen O'Hara on the subject. One set of questions is about whether these are competencies or capacities or qualities or virtues or what they are. I use the term 'competencies' because it has a validity in the existing culture and might form a bridge into the territory I want to explore. A second set of questions is about what the competencies are. But the danger is that any listing will be interpreted in our existing culture as a new tick the box checklist and an excuse for yet more specialist training programmes. I do not want to feed that culture. But *Rising to the Occasion* did include a list of characteristics of '21st century people' to hint at the kinds of qualities I am referring to. That list included e.g. innovative and conservative; multiple truths lightly held; thinks holistically and systemically; ethics: 'right action' over fixed principles… and so on.

It's the culture stupid

My sense of cultural crisis is stronger than ever today. The parallels with previous eras of cultural collapse are worrying. Philipp Blom's recent history of Europe from 1900–14, *The Vertigo Years* (2008), lays bare a culture stretched to breaking point by the sudden acceleration of the industrial age. That story did not end well.

The same sense of cultural dislocation is evident in the US. T. Jackson Lears meticulously details 'the transformation of American culture' under the pressures of the birth of modern capitalism between 1880 and 1920 in his excellent *No Place of Grace* (1994). A common theme is the collapse of male identity in a world of automation and office work. A whole set of cultural institutions were established to deal with the resulting ennui – the boy scouts, DIY, militarism, English style public schools, a revival of medievalism and the courtly code, self help and psychotherapy.

It is a short step from these frighteningly forensic studies of cultures under pressure to the contemporary world, in which the sense is growing both that we are living inside a culture in flux (wherever we live) and that the culture is not supporting either us or the planet terribly well.

To give one example: I have been involved in work with Professor Phil Hanlon, University of Glasgow, on the deeper causes of Scotland's poor health (including mental health). Obesity, drugs, alcohol abuse etc are all at high levels. This contrasts starkly with improvements in health over the last decade in newly liberated parts of Eastern Europe. They started way behind Scotland, but have now overtaken – even though they spend less on education, have poorer access to healthcare, lower incomes etc. It seems that while other nations have successfully reinvented themselves for the modern era, or have come through a period of cultural transition, Scotland still has some way to go to be comfortable in today's world. Hanlon concludes that at root Scotland's ill-health is a cultural problem – and requires an act of cultural leadership to address it.

How cultures change: prophetic imagination

So how do cultures change, and how can the process be led?

I have found practical wisdom in the work of Walter Brueggemann, an Old Testament scholar. He has made a study of what he calls 'the prophetic imagination' (2001), which I believe is where cultural leadership finds its roots.

Brueggemann suggests that the role of the prophet is threefold: to warn about the dangers and iniquities of the existing system; to paint a desirable vision of the promised land; and to maintain energy and commitment in the people during the 40 years in the wilderness it will take to make the transition.

In his book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (2006) the philosopher Jonathan Lear tells the story of one such prophet and cultural leader, Plenty Coups, chief of the Crow nation at the end of the 19th century. His tribe were coming under pressure from the white man to give up their way of life and enter the reservation. The culture that had supported and defined the Crow nation's world was threatened with collapse.

Plenty Coups described the transition many years later as follows: 'When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again'. As one Crow woman put it, in terms that many would echo today: 'I am trying to live a life I do not understand'.

Some tribes gave in to despair, accepted the white man's 'superiority' and the inevitable loss of their culture. Resistance was futile. Some – like Sitting Bull and the Sioux – chose to go down fighting. To the bitter end, as it turned out. Neither was successful in negotiating a cultural transition.

But Plenty Coups had a dream that although the buffalo would vanish, provided they kept attuned to changing conditions, the Crow would come through to find a new way of living. Lear calls this 'radical hope' – the hope for cultural rebirth, but without any predetermined vision of what that rebirth will look like. In the event Crow youth learned the white man's law, negotiated favourable settlements, maintained far more of their land than

any other tribe and came to reinvent notions of honour and courage in a world without warriors.

Lear (2006) writes:

There may be various forms of ethical criticism that one might be tempted to level at this form of hopefulness: that it was too complacent; that it didn't face up to the evil that was being inflicted on the Crow tribe. But it is beyond question that the hope was a remarkable human accomplishment – in no small part because it avoided despair.

I regard this as a story for our times. As the skies turn dark and the 'imminent collapse of civilisation' literature grows, we too are in need of inspiration if we are to avoid the predictable future. How else can we interpret the swell of emotion around the world at the election of Obama? The former New York Governor Mario Cuomo said that we campaign in poetry but govern in prose. Nobody denies that. But we do need both. Without the poetry, the vision, we have no hope. The authentic voice in Obama's poetry awakens that same authentic voice in us.

Small acts of creative transgression

Disappointment sets in early. We are impatient for a new and hopeful coherence. Our mistake is to assume that changing a culture is the same as changing a policy, or the institutional architecture, or a light bulb. Cultures – even small scale cultures – change slowly, organically. They change through conversation. They are always in motion, always in transition. You cannot just replace one culture with another.

But they do shift over time, and according to a familiar pattern. There is always a dominant culture side by side with practice that challenges the norm. Cultures progress as examples of new practice are nurtured, in the soil of the old culture but not in support of it.

As I argued in *Rising to the Occasion* (2007), the beginning of cultural leadership is always a small

act of creative transgression. It is small because transgression on a larger scale amounts to revolution. And because the smaller – and cheaper – it is, the easier it is for others to follow the lead. It must also be transgressive because in order to shift the culture we must challenge it: we must do something counter-cultural. And it is creative, rather than merely disruptive, because it appeals to the culture's deeper values, its 'better self'.

This is a paradox. In order to transgress within a culture you must first be accepted into it. And for the culture to evolve, the transgression must at some level be welcomed and permitted. Thus Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent protest relied on the British reluctance to attack those who do not fight. It was an appeal to the British administrators' better nature.

Such work requires a potent combination of political awareness and cultural imagination. It is a combination we see in the 'producer' role in the arts: the artful introduction of the new in the presence of the old, bringing the future system into being whilst accounting for actions to funders and board members embedded in a culture the actions are designed to challenge. This ability to 'ride two paradigms' at the same time is another fundamental 21st century competence.

It is the quality found in small acts of creative transgression. Rosa Parks taking a seat at the front of the bus. Or many examples closer to home and closer to the world of day to day policy concerns. It took a new head teacher at the Hornsey School for Girls in North London, for example, to turn off the school bell for a fortnight as an experiment. There were complaints at first and resistance, but over time it dramatically improved the environment, brought out all kinds of unanticipated beneficial community behaviours and the bell has never been restored.

Luiz Eduardo Soares, an anthropologist, philosopher and political scientist, introduced the 'cool police station' programme while Director of Public Safety in Rio de Janeiro in 1999. He wanted to make civil police stations more welcoming, human and professional. He put flowers on the front desks and hired university students to act as receptionists. This was one of many subtle interventions throughout the city to try to shift the

culture of violence. It was not these small creative transgressions that led to his downfall, but his more overtly revolutionary public attacks on corruption at senior levels. He was forced out of office after just over a year.

Since early 2008, Luke Jerram has placed battered old street pianos in anonymous public places for anyone to play. He has installed nearly 100 pianos so far in towns and cities across the UK, and now cities all over the world are following his lead. He has struggled everywhere with local council regulations, health and safety, and in London had to apply for an individual music licence for each piano (a matter subsequently raised in the House of Lords). But wherever it goes Jerram's 'Play Me I'm Yours' project has transformed community andrelationship and lit up people's lives.

In each of these cases the intervention is subtle, small scale, low cost. But in the economy of meaning these are highly significant interventions – and have been recognised as such. They evoke a resource in us that lies hidden in a culture under strain. They are acts of cultural leadership.

Evoking 21st century competencies

I turn finally to the evocative nature of these interventions. Each calls forth something already existing but hidden in the dominant culture. The same is true of individuals. Hence my sense that cultural leadership is more a capacity that can be enabled than a skill that has to be learned.

Two stories will serve to illustrate the point. I have recently been working with government to explore the notion of 'the policy maker of the future'. A series of workshops with senior officials rapidly revealed a set of competencies that the policy maker of the future might need to display – orchestrating complex systems, leading without power, taking risks, tolerating ambiguity etc. But it was equally clear that there is little call for such competencies in the existing policy process. Indeed, they may well be seen as disruptive.

Developing a training programme for these competencies will therefore be an expensive

waste of money. Changing the policy process to accord with the state of today's world will by contrast reveal a whole range of capacities within existing staff that have remained largely hidden up to now. We see them already in those with the courage to subvert the dominant culture – a capacity for creative transgression (which some call 'risk taking'); a willingness to acknowledge that understanding is provisional and quantitative data only a small part of any story; an ability to engage with communities on equal terms as co-learners; a capacity to tolerate uncertainty and messiness as part of a process; an awareness of and a capacity to resist the neuroticism rooted in the policy culture; and so on. These 21st century competencies are demonstrated and developed through experience – the experience of standing for a new culture in the presence of the old.

The same is true of real cultural leadership. Some of the early preparatory work for the British Council's Cultural Leadership International Programme, for example, revealed an astonishingly rich canvas for learning through practice. Among those consulted Owere cultural leaders in the Near East and North Africa. They were predictably keen to pick up from the UK the latest in Western management thinking and best practice in leading first rate cultural institutions.

But they also wanted to explore the messy and uncertain territory in which they actually have to conduct their business – in which there is often no stable state architecture to lobby or interact with, and where the culture is improvised, temporary, personal, ad hoc. There is a great opportunity in such cultural exchange for discovering the valuable capacities that operating in such an environment develops – capacities that are of value way beyond the cultural sector.

Ultimately the distinction I wish to draw attention to is between 'developing people' and enabling them to grow. All developmental models, which are themselves the product of a culture, are based on a hierarchical, stage by stage development, ultimately going back to Abraham Maslow's reading of a hierarchy of human needs.

But in practice there is no hierarchy. We do not meet the needs one by one and then ascend to the pinnacle of 'self-actualisation'. We do not have to satisfy the need for shelter in order to graduate to the need for love. We are all capacious human beings with capacities for higher purpose – and this can be evoked in the right settings, especially in groups.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the landscape, it is tempting simply to echo Jake Chapman (2004) and conclude that encouraging real cultural leadership is 'both more difficult and more urgent than I realised'. It is certainly more urgent. But I sense that it may actually be easier – and certainly cheaper – to encourage than many assume.

At its simplest, developing cultural leadership in the terms I understand it revolves around three elements:

- a recognition that real cultural leadership involves creative transgression, and a long term perspective. It is not about making the existing system more productive or efficient
- the competencies associated with this reading of cultural leadership cannot be assessed in the abstract, they can only be demonstrated in practice. The corollary is that they cannot be 'taught', only developed through experience
- they can be developed through an explicit process of social learning, in the company of people more experienced in this kind of cultural leadership (not necessarily from the arts and cultural sector) – for example, in creative adhocracies that are consciously seeking to grow people as part of their mission, and in encounters (like learning journeys) that give a shared and reflective experience of the complex, messy reality of real life

Together these elements start to define a shift in the 'culture' of cultural leadership. What community could be better placed to pioneer that shift than the arts and culture sector itself?

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04 Engaging hearts and minds: leadership and taking part

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Holly Jones
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Holly Jones specialises in participant-led creative productions, particularly film and theatre. Holly was Director of Education, Training and Community at the National Youth Theatre and prior to this worked in documentary television for seven years as Assistant Producer and Director. She has an MA in Cultural Leadership from City University.

Although public participation in creative activities is increasing, there is evidence that attendance at some arts events and venues is frozen or declining. In this paper we propose that there is a way to increase engagement through participation, but that it will require a new leadership model. This model, which we call 'Engaging Leadership', will need a new type of language to express the value of culture; it will offer more opportunities for taking part in creation and performance; and it will open up the decision-making process, making dialogue possible with users and non-users and enabling them to become involved in shaping the experiences on offer. It will require a change of governance and organisational structure, away from the hierarchical and siloed models that have held sway for over a hundred years.

Buried in the middle of a recent report, *Taking Part*, is a fascinating statistic. Nearly 25% of the population had participated in an arts activity *at least once a week* over the previous two years (DCMS, 2008).[1] When compared to the rate of attendance at arts events – no more than *once a year* for the vast majority – this rate of participation is quite extraordinary (Bunting et al, 2008). There is some evidence too that attendance at arts events is declining, whereas participation rates for creative activities are increasing (*Arts Professional*, 2009). If this trend continues, it could spell serious danger for venue and performance-based arts as they struggle to defend their claim to public money in the face of increasing demands from social services, health and education.

Are arts organisations missing a trick? Can we find a way of capitalising on people's willingness to participate in arts activities to encourage them to attend more theatre, music, dance and exhibitions? Could forging a link between participation and attendance be the key to that elusive concept, 'engagement'? If so, how can cultural leaders ensure their own organisation's structure, programming and creative practice are best placed to do this?

In this paper we propose that there is a way to increase engagement through participation, but it will require a new leadership model. This model will need a new type of language to express the value of culture; it will offer more opportunities for taking part in creation and performance; and it will open up the decision-making process, making dialogue possible with users and non-users and enabling them to become involved in shaping the experiences on offer. It will require a change of governance and organisational structure, away from the hierarchical and siloed models that have held sway for over a hundred years.

We will argue that the move to this new 'engaging' leadership model is becoming more and more urgent with the rise of a generation brought up on wikis, blogs and social networks, which expects to play a more active role in the shaping of its own experiences. Finally, we will argue that the cultural sector is well placed to develop this new type of open, responsive and connected leadership. Theatre, music and dance practitioners as well as museum educators have great experience in using creative practice to communicate with audiences. This practice can be used to build the new language required, to suggest forms of engagement and to start the dialogue. It is often said that other sectors have a lot to learn from the creativity of the cultural sector. This new model of 'engaging' cultural leadership rooted in existing creative practice could provide the 'road map'.

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1 The figure here is calculated from the statement that 52% of all adults had participated in an arts activity in 2006/7 and 45% of these had engaged in these at least once a week.

The 'Taking Part' society

The so-called crisis of leadership in the UK cultural sector at the turn of the millennium has been linked by most commentators to financial and managerial issues. Since then, these issues have been addressed by an enormous injection of government and private cash into infrastructure, running costs and training. But we propose that money is only part of the problem. The more serious challenge to cultural leaders is paradigmatic social and economic change. On its way out is a hierarchically-structured society dominated by powerful organisations that determine the goods and services provided to largely passive consumers. Replacing it is a networked 'Taking Part' society which gives individuals the freedom and power to do more for and by themselves as well as in loose commonality with others: in other words, to bypass organisations if they choose (Benkler, 2006). These individuals 'seek true voice, direct participation, unmediated influence and identity-based community because they are comfortable *using their own experience as the basis for making judgments*' [our italics] (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2004).

Where individuals do choose to interact with organisations, the relationships they have are increasingly sophisticated. Leadbeater sums this up as a move from the relatively simple world of 'To and For' to one in which successful organisations finesse the 'Art of With': a world in which collective thinking and collaboration with the audience/consumer are seen as riches to be mined (Leadbeater, 2009). This necessitates not only new business models, but new roles for leaders and organisations whose power and legitimacy have traditionally resided in professional expertise.

The effects of these changes are already being keenly felt in the creative industries such as music, films, newspapers and commercial broadcasting. It is not that the products themselves are no longer attractive, but that audiences want to be free to access and manipulate them in different ways. The result is an ever-evolving smorgasbord of personalised services, playlists, peer reviews, individually targeted marketing, price and service comparison websites, social networking, feedback and feedback on feedback…

The need for dialogue

The desire for 'taking part' in the arts is borne out by the high rate of participation noted in the DCMS survey. This interest in amateur participation is echoed in huge viewing figures for the talent shows that dominate TV schedules. On the other hand, attendance in many areas of professionally performed and curated arts is frozen or declining.[2] At the same time, many of those who now rarely attend cultural events speak 'of being excluded from something *they would like to be included in*' (Holden, 2008). The sector has been slow to ask why, as the former head of the Arts Council has admitted:

> … it is hard to object to the view that people who use a publicly funded facility or service should have the chance to express opinions about it and be heard. But I do not see much in the arts (Hewitt, 2005).

In the words of John Knell (2006), 'The supplier knows best seems to be the dominant attitude'. There has been much debate around the role and value of the arts in 21st century Britain, but it has generally ricocheted between the closed walls of institutions, funding bodies and policy makers, failing to address and involve that crucial group – the public themselves.

Just as the web has required people and businesses to adopt new habits and roles, so do cultural professionals and organisations need to consider how they can harness audience energy, goodwill, know-how and loyalty. We propose that this requires new more open organisational structures and leadership models – models which place real dialogue with the public at the core of organisational DNA.

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2 According to recent figures, the proportion of the population 'actively involved in the arts' has declined from 24.1% in 2005/6 to 22.6% in 2007/8. *Arts Professional* (12 January 2009).

Robert Hewison makes the point that a great many cultural organisations operate in what he calls a 'mature market', 'with a fixed conception of the audience that they are trying to reach, and a conventional and well-established way of delivering work' (Hewison, 2006). The roots of this traditional model are in the theatre of ancient Greece, with groups of actors paid by the state to enact plays for a passive audience. This created the best conditions for artistic excellence, and over the centuries actors and 'professionals' in other art forms have defined and controlled public experience. In this 'culture of professionalism', power and status derive from artistic expertise and there is no scope for dialogue with the public. The audience is invited to attend and listen, but has no role to play and no say apart from the right to vote with their feet. In recent years, influenced by models imported from the commercial sector, the audience has come to be seen as a customer, improving the quality of the service but not fundamentally altering the one-way relationship.

In addition, embedded values shared by some continue to hamper the attempts of others to engage with public opinion. John Holden identifies the three groups he sees as gatekeepers 'keeping the mob at bay': the 'malign experts' or professionals who use their knowledge to confound and patronise; the 'cultural snobs' who perpetuate processes of exclusion bound up in class and education; and the avant garde artists who've traditionally defined themselves in opposition to the masses (Holden, 2008).

Passivity was taken as a matter of course by audiences throughout the 20th century and cultural organisations and artists were generally held in high esteem. But in the last few decades, the decline of deference and increasing percentage of the British population with higher education qualifications of their own has led to criticism of what is perceived to be the elitism of many cultural organisations and increasing calls for the democratisation of culture. Now that this is being compounded by the demands of the 'Taking Part' generation and an increasingly diverse society which no longer shares the professionals' largely Eurocentric cultural values,

it is doubtful that the one-way professionalised model described will survive much longer.

There is evidence of limited interest in greater public participation. Artists such as Martin Creed and Anthony Gormley are interested in collaboration and dialogue as opposed to proclamation, initiating what Leadbeater calls 'art as a kind of conversation…' (Leadbeater, 2009). The vogue for documentary theatre, involving intense research with real-life protagonists, reflects this trend by locating authenticity in verisimilitude, beyond the art work itself. In some companies, work that has long remained tucked away in outreach or community departments is finding its way into the main house. At the Young Vic, the Studio stages productions parallel to the main house plays, performed by recruits from the local community. The four-star hit this season at the National Youth Theatre (NYT) – *Father's Inside* – was written and developed in collaboration with prisoners at Rochester Young Offenders Institution, and performed by a cast of socially excluded young people alongside NYT members. And in November 2009, the Philharmonia's digital residency on the Southbank used audio and video projections to allow members of the audience to conduct, perform and step inside the orchestra as it performed Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.

Much more is needed. In his exploration and advocacy of personalisation, Knell describes two existing sets of outcomes: 'soft personalisation' – concerning consumer-centric marketing, customer relations and the development of open and responsive institutions; and 'hard personalisation' – 'not about marketing a [finished] product to an audience, but about encouraging them to participate and engage in its design and production'. He reports that personalisation in the arts is beginning, but generally it is of the 'soft' type, in response to the opportunities offered by Web 2.0: the few 'hard p' initiatives tend to originate from artists rather than institutions (Knell, 2006). We contend that while 'soft personalisation' may succeed in reaching out a bit further, it is only by taking the values and processes of 'hard personalisation' right to the core of our institutions,

i.e. engaging the public in ongoing dialogue, that they will become truly representative.

A new 'Engaging Leadership' model

All this has direct implications for leadership. The cultural sector has its fair share of inspirational figures but their style of leadership tends to remain 'top down' (and middle-class white male): sometimes it is transactional, using power, position, politics and perks to achieve results; occasionally, it is charismatic; and, rarely, it is transformational with staff realigned and re-energised with new values and missions. Combined with the traditional one-way relationship between cultural professionals and audiences, this heroic model sits uncomfortably with current social trends. A 1998 survey of attitudes toward leadership among young Americans found that they favoured a model of leadership that is 'bottom up' rather than 'top down', 'that emphasizes the collective participation of many individuals over the strong leadership of just a few' (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2004). Seventy nine percent believed that 'average people', not experts, 'have the resources and practical know-how to solve most of their problems in the community.' Legitimacy based on inclusion is replacing legitimacy based on hierarchical authority (Dalton, 2000).

The latest word in leadership (for example, in the analysis of the Obama victory last year) is 'distributed leadership', where responsibility for leadership is dissociated from hierarchical power. But this is difficult to practice in any meaningful sense; it takes very secure leaders to cede control and delegate strategic power. Achieving it would be particularly difficult with the artistic 'culture of professionalism' in which leaders are often appointed to positions with little leadership experience and even less management training. And while distributed leadership would increase the diversity of points of view within organisational boundaries, it would not address the demand for more dialogue beyond them. This will only be addressed by bringing into the process more points of view from outside.

The leadership models which make this possible are Lipman-Blumen's 'connective' leadership and Hegelsen's 'webs of inclusion'. Connective leaders develop a sense of purpose across organisational boundaries, perceiving connections between diverse people, ideas and institutions (Lipman-Blumen 2002). Political know-how is important as is the ability to articulate and hold onto core values, and to be ethical and accountable. Hegelsen's webs go even further towards embracing the outside world, replacing organisational boundaries with 'a guiding set of principles and attitudes' which allows the organisation 'to shift and adapt to changing circumstances, while remaining open at the parameters and constantly pulling people into the decision-making process' (Hegelsen, 2005).

How, in practice, do these more inclusive models work? Yochai Benkler, one of the key theorists of the new 'networked information economy', calls for altered relationships between leaders and followers. He gives the example of Linus Torvald (who led the development of the Linux open-source software) who was able to 'identify patterns that emerge in the community and inspire trust that they are correctly judging the patterns that are valuable from the perspective of the users' (Benkler, 2006). Followers take part in specific initiatives (both in decision-making and in 'doing') rather than assuming passive roles in relation to established organisations and leaders. Like webs of inclusion, this makes for very fluid boundaries, with people – specialists and non-specialists – falling inside and outside of organisational boundaries according to their desire to take part in different initiatives.

It is this more inclusive model which we believe will lead to real public engagement in the cultural sector. We call it 'Engaging Leadership' and we believe it has a fine pedigree in existing creative practice.

Creative engagement, engaging leadership

Embedded within their creative practice, cultural organisations hold the key to an exciting new leadership model built upon principles of dynamic engagement. In the historical narrative of their missions (although often in siloed education and outreach departments) lies considerable expertise in reaching out to groups currently not engaging. Also specific to some forms of creative practice is commitment to ensemble – literally, 'together'– a commitment that is being embedded currently, for example, in the newly restructured RSC.

The sector can draw on this practice when beginning to develop structures and mechanisms that challenge traditional hierarchies and open up critical decisions to a broader constituency. Research on young people's participation in decision-making in the public sector reveals that the experience is often boring, frustrating and tokenistic, involving people in structures that intimidate without giving them the tools and resources to make informed decisions (Borland et al., 2001, Fowler and Oldfield, 2004). For participation to be effective, a process of education must take place, and this should be enjoyable and rewarding (Lowndes et al., 2006, Cronin et al., 2003). The creative sector houses the expertise to do this: to reach out and educate people with a view to engaging them in the process of deciding about programming and direction. This will benefit both organisation and the individuals involved by nurturing and giving expression to those 'ideas that live in the minds of many' (Leadbeater, 2009).

There are a few green shoots appearing. Well known for allowing the audience to play an integral part in their shows, Improbable Theatre have built on their collaborative expertise and now regularly host Open Space events, where participants set the agenda and lead discussions on issues facing theatre and the arts more broadly. At the NYT, the recently established youth council is adopting a similar model for *Not Your Typical Gathering* – a creative consultation aiming to 'reinforce the sense of the NYT belonging to each member… [and] enable them to voice their opinions [and]

explore ways of developing their involvement with the company…'(NYT Youth Council, 2009). And in a truly radical move, the Theatre Royal Stratford East is putting the general public in charge of programming for the first six months of 2012.

There is evidence too of efforts to connect with those who are not yet players in the cultural field. Where education and culture intersect, for example in the development of the *Find Your Talent* programme, a government commitment to engagement has demanded that young people are directly involved in developing the cultural entitlement. This appears to be working particularly well when creative practice is developed to engage young participants imaginatively and in a process which empowers, educates and inspires (Jones, 2009). Results so far are promising, pointing to an invigorated programme and a newly inspired and articulate group of advocates, keen to spread the word in their communities.

This process is viewed by many with trepidation, as a concession to the pressure to pander to the tastes of ever wider audiences, threatening the excellence which results from professionalism. It is clear that the lure of mass appeal should never be permitted to suffocate the emergence of minority, complex and challenging work. Professionals will always be needed to inform the dialogue.

As with the concept of 'the right to roam' in the countryside, [where] we need experts to give us maps and guides, so we will need a new standard of cultural leadership if individuals are going to enjoy a cultural 'right to roam' (DCMS, 2001).

Conclusion

It is our contention that widening engagement can be both a creative and mutually beneficial journey, an opportunity for cultural organisations to embrace the new spirit of exploration and travel with the public as enablers without lowering standards.

The possibilities are endlessly creative. How about a toolkit on the website of the National Theatre

(NT) encouraging people to make and film their own five minute plays in response to productions they have seen, met with responses from the NT? A template from the British Film Institute that encourages filmed reviews and new perspectives on the archive? Live online chats with directors, artists, artistic directors and chief executives? The key issue is that 'participation' must go beyond 'posting' and become a genuine dialogue which informs future activity.

We need to take bold steps at the heart of our institutions, a future where 'friends' are not merely names who receive an email once a month, but teams of participants and public advisors, engaged, trained and nurtured by the organisation and developed as advocates and critics, supporters and protestors, collaborators, confidantes and challengers – true friends in every sense.

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05 # Creating an aesthetic of inclusivity: a new solution to the 'problem' of women leaders

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This article addresses the question of how organisations might increase female representation at their most senior levels. Rather than suggesting this is best achieved through 'women-only' training, it argues that senior teams within organisations consider the 'aesthetic' which they create through their habitual ways of interacting and whether or not that aesthetic is inclusive or alienating. The way in which a group or organisation's 'aesthetic' is generated is analysed through two of Schein's (1984) three levels of culture – 'artefacts' and 'basic assumptions' – and I offer a discussion of how these would have to shift to create an 'aesthetic of inclusivity'.

I have recently been engaged to conduct an organisational development intervention with the CEO and senior team of a UK-based social enterprise which I will refer to as Zelzac Association (a pseudonym). There is not one woman among its 10 members. This is despite 65% of its remaining workforce comprising women, and the fact that it operates in a sector which is not particularly male dominated.

The executive team would like to 'do something' to make itself 'more diverse', i.e. they would like to include women (well, perhaps at least one?) among their members. They have approached me to help them achieve this goal. The issue is similar to that which cultural organisations are trying to address.

Traditionally, the 'problem' of low female representation in the highest echelons of organisational hierarchies has been tackled by offering 'high potential women' the chance to attend women's leadership development programmes. Underlying this solution is the assumption that the lack of women within an organisation's top team indicates the lack of executive-level talent and expertise among women employees. Therefore, if women with such potential are 'topped up' with the necessary skills – and perhaps a dollop of extra self-confidence – certainly one or more would be able to join the senior ranks. This solution is indicative of a very commonly held view – that gender equality in the workplace can be addressed by 'fixing the women'.

However, as a female academic who has been engaged with this particular organisation, I am very reluctant to suggest this way forward. In truth, the only outcome I could imagine resulting from such a strategy would be that sooner, rather than later, the woman would be 'chewed up and spat out' by this group of senior managers.

When I began to discuss the lack of female membership with the few women located at the next lower level of the organisational hierarchy, they all met my questions with wry looks. 'Why would I want to put myself into that bullring?' one replied. I knew what she was talking about. On a one-to-one basis, each of the men who comprised the group was charming and didn't portray overtly sexist tendencies. But together, the top team was a formidable male preserve.

In this article I consider how this group of senior executives, and others like it, create this impression. The more I thought about my own experience of the top team, the more I was convinced that together its members exuded a particular 'aesthetic', one which excluded women. Interestingly, I have been involved with other groups of men who have not created such an effect, so it is not necessarily just about its homogenous make-up. How is such an aesthetic created, and how might an aesthetic of 'inclusivity' be generated instead?

Before exploring what I mean by an 'aesthetic of inclusivity', and how it might alter the situation at Zelzac, let's revisit the range of approaches

organisations take to 'get more women' at the top of their hierarchies.

Strategies for increasing female representation at the top of organisations

Ely (2003) offers four different approaches organisations can be seen to employ in their efforts to increase the number of women holding senior roles. First, aligned with 'first-wave' feminist approaches, is the approach referred to earlier in this article:

Fix the women

From this perspective, the 'problem' of gender disparity within the workplace is seen to be located with women. Based on an underlying assumption that everyone has equal access to opportunities, the lack of women taking up senior roles is interpreted as evidence that they don't know 'the rules of the game'. Developmental interventions are geared to teaching women these rules, helping them to 'learn the language' of senior leaders, as well as to become more assertive and confident.

This is the strategy which underpins most 'women-only' leadership development programmes. Certainly such schemes can be beneficial to women who aspire to senior managerial levels. In particular, they can provide participants with a peer group with whom they can share perceptions and effective strategies for achieving promotion and building their visibility. Additionally, just being selected to attend such a programme can send useful signals to women who might otherwise not recognise their own leadership potential. However, although 'women only' management development programmes have been in vogue for nearly 20 years now, this strategy has not spearheaded a revolution in the numbers of women occupying senior positions. The fundamental issue, it seems, rests elsewhere.

The second strategy suggested by Ely is:

Celebrate the differences

This involves acknowledging that women are socialised to be different from men, and that these differences are of value and importance to organisations. 'Celebrate the difference' rhetoric is very alive in contemporary organisations which, because of the need for more distributed and responsive ways of operating, must rely on more relational and emotional intelligence to get things done. These attributes are more commonly associated with women. Therefore, the logic goes, by valuing the difference women bring, senior ranks of organisations will more proactively seek out and appoint women members. Interventions based on this approach generally aim to raise consciousness of men as well as women, and to promote more 'tolerant' and 'inclusive' organisational norms.

However, the organisational theorist Joyce Fletcher has noted the limitations of the assumptions underpinning this strategy. In her article 'The Paradox of Post Heroic Leadership' (2006) she points out the mismatch between characteristics most commonly attributed to 'the leader' and those associated with being female. Individuals, be they male or female, who exhibit caring, softer characteristics are routinely rated as 'low' on attribution scales of 'leadership'. Furthermore, women who express themselves directly, who take conversational space within public fora and perform in other ways associated with 'leading', are characterised as aggressive and opinionated, rather than 'leaderly'. Women, it seems, are in a catch-22 position when it comes to leading. Rhetoric emphasising the benefits of diversity cannot change the deeply-seated assumptions which hold these views in place.

The third approach is:

Create equal opportunity

This strategy is based on the recognition that differences between men and women do exist, and that the structural aspects of organisations tend to exacerbate those differences. The notion of the

'glass ceiling' is informed by this view. Organisations operating from this frame tackle gender equality issues by attending to organisational structures and practices. For instance, the introduction of flexible working, generous maternity and paternity leave and creating childcare provision are initiatives resulting from this orientation.

Again, this strategy has met with mixed results. Although formal organisational policies can be created which would allow both women and men to balance their work roles more easily with caring and domestic commitments, in reality the informal expectations set for senior managers can prohibit their use. An organisation may boast about enlightened policies in relation to flexible working, but if the norm within the senior team is that managers are seen to be working long hours and weekends, this assumed norm may take precedence over formal policies in terms of actual work practices. In organisations where commitment and visibility are equated, the need to be seen to be working long hours can militate against such structural attempts to create equal opportunity between men and women in the workplace.

After reviewing these options, Ely suggests that the most powerful approach to increasing the incidence of women in senior managerial positions is also the most difficult:

Revise work culture

From this frame, disparity in gender representation is seen to stem from cultural norms within the organisation itself. In order to encourage norms which amount to more than tokenism and rhetoric, the organisation must consider how its culture represents, provides opportunities for and rewards its women members. It must consider quite truthfully the extent to which its practices and norms match its espoused values about equality of opportunity and rewards.

Ely suggests that in order to shift women's representation at senior levels, organisational cultures must change. Another way of thinking about culture, however, is through the lens of aesthetic apprehension. Some might say the two are synonymous. However, I believe there are subtle

distinctions, as well as important ways in which these two concepts overlap, in how they could inform the pursuit of increased numbers of women in senior organisational roles. Let's start by exploring what I mean by the term 'aesthetic' and how it might be applied to organisations.

The aesthetic of an organisation

The first distinction to make is that in using the word aesthetic, I am not referring solely to 'the beautiful' or the 'attractive'. In colloquial parlance, the two are often used interchangeably, so the statement 'the building has an aesthetic appeal' means that the building has a pleasant ambience. However, in the way I am using the term, every building has an aesthetic. Sometimes that aesthetic is appealing and other times it is not. 'Ugly', 'chaotic', 'comic', 'dreary' are all aesthetic categories. They all refer to our 'felt apprehension' of something or someone. The philosopher Susan Buck-Morss stresses that, rather than being associated with art, in its earliest form the philosophical field of aesthetics focused on the 'sensory experience of perception' (1992: 6). It is an instinctual, rather than rational, response conveying information about our surrounds and those people we meet. In this way, an organisation's aesthetic will result from its culture – it is the perceived 'sense' of culture which is apprehended at an immediate, visceral level by those who come into contact with the organisation or group.

Aesthetic apprehension is at play in the perceptions of the women with whom I spoke in Zelzac Association about their reservations about joining the senior management team. 'It's a *boys' club*', one woman reported. 'They operate like a pack. I'd never fit in.' Another said, 'There's something slightly – I don't know – *predatory* about them when they are together. I always feel uncomfortable when I have to make presentations to them.' I knew what these women were talking about. When lecturing to the group, I'd experienced an unsettling energy in the room which at the time I attributed to the fact that I was a woman teaching

a group of men. Of course such an apprehension is hard to express, largely because of its subjective nature. It was only through discussing my experience with these women that I began to give my own perceptions weight as real, rather than imagined. Like them, I knew that I did not enjoy being with the group en masse, even though I was happy to speak to any of them one-to-one.

This aesthetic dimension is very hard to address for at least two reasons. First, it is subjectively determined. Although I (and other senior women) experienced the senior management team of Zelzac as predatory, other women might not have. Also, even if this was a universally agreed experience, how might such an aesthetic be changed? After all, its provenance is the deeply held and embedded values of individuals who interact with one another in a certain way to produce this dynamic. That is, the group's aesthetic isn't even just a function of individuals and how their beliefs are expressed, but arise from the group's way of interacting together. Before examining this, let's consider some of the ways in which an organisation's or group's aesthetic is generated at a more 'surface' level and therefore might be easier to tackle.

How might an aesthetic of inclusivity be generated?

The aesthetic of an organisation or a group manifests itself at different levels. Here, I will borrow from Edgar Schein's model of organisational culture (1984) to consider two levels of organisational culture: the surface level of artefacts and the deep level of fundamental assumptions and how they might manifest themselves aesthetically.

Artefacts: what do you see?
One of the key signifiers of the Zelzac senior team's aesthetic is its male only composition. For the top team to be comprised solely of men, while operating in a significantly heterogeneous sector, sends a clear message about the value it places on diversity. Of course this is also a chicken and egg situation – appointing one woman executive team member

would not necessarily alter the group's aesthetic, but without female representation, it is difficult to imagine how its aesthetic could shift.

Other artefacts also contribute to an organisation's aesthetic. Moving away from Zelzac momentarily to consider my own organisation, on the occasions on which I ascend the staircase leading to the Director's office, I am confronted by an ascending array of photographs of serious-looking, middle-aged, white males duly identified as former Directors of the School. Similarly, when I walk along one of the main public corridors of our Management Development Centre, I pass a collection of photos of 'the great and the good' who have visited my organisation. Interestingly, once again they are all male. Rationally, I understand these are individuals who have made noteworthy achievements; aesthetically, I am left with the felt sense of overwhelming 'maleness', something quite 'other' from myself.

This experience is contrasted with that of entering the Regional Head Office of one of the UK's leading financial institutions when visiting to conduct research there. Rather than encountering a gallery of male portraits, I found the walls of the entrance were covered in pictures of the company's recent summer outing. Employees of both genders and from a range of ethnic backgrounds were photographed playing rounders together, eating barbecued food and generally enjoying one another's company. The inclusive aesthetic generated by these photos was further enhanced when I met the senior manager whom I had come to interview. After securing my preference for coffee, he got a drink not just for me, but for his female secretary as well.

This action on his part speaks to another dimension of cultural artefacts: the accepted work practices and ways things 'get done'.

Work practices: how are things done?
As a recognised leader in its field in terms of profitability and growth, Zelzac enjoyed a sector-wide reputation for being very achievement driven and 'macho' in its approach to doing business. This was illustrated by the way senior women characterised their impressions of the way in which the executive team operated. A recurring theme expressed by

these women was that they did not aspire to join it because of the way its members interacted. The terms 'bear pit' and 'bullring' were used, and there was a sense that although relations between executive members were cordial, aggression was also used as an acceptable way of getting things done.

Additionally, top team members were seen to work long and anti-social hours. Although the organisation aspired to create a family-friendly culture, the long hours, weekends and frequent 'off-site' events required of senior managers told a different story. A strong sense of paternalism imbued the organisation, with senior managers often feeling they could not assume responsibility that might rightfully be theirs for fear of 'getting things wrong' or not pleasing the Chief Executive. Together, the perception of the way in which the top team operated, coupled with the paternalism of the culture, created a distinct 'male' aesthetic, which senior women found off-putting.

How might such working practices be effectively altered? Again, I might contrast the aesthetic 'feel' of the Zelzac executive team with that of the top team of a UK-based brewery I recently researched. Prior to visiting this organisation, I expected to encounter a very 'male' organisation, indicative of my prejudiced view of breweries. Instead, I discovered one which seemed to embrace diversity in every aspect of its operations. Although predominantly male, 30% of the top team members were women, and in the meetings I attended they were often the centre of lively discussions about the role of the organisation in the larger community and novel ways of marketing their products.

The Chief Executive was male, but he actively encouraged participation from both men and women. The effectiveness of his style was demonstrated by the myriad of small scale projects being carried out by a large number of employees throughout the organisation. My co-researcher and I experienced the entire organisation as vibrant and vital; in fact, its infectiousness was such that we both agreed we ourselves would like to be part of it!

Of course the working practices we experienced were indicative of the deeper level of values and beliefs held by the CEO and his team.

Fundamental assumptions: the building blocks of organisational aesthetics
The deepest layer of organisational culture is that of the underpinning assumptions which are enacted through work practices and physical artefacts. Likewise, these assumptions inform an organisation's aesthetic. An organisation which values orderliness, adherence to deadlines and control could express these through the proliferation of flowcharts, diagrams, and rewards which recognise material achievements. An organisation which values creativity, responsiveness and openness might express these through creating space for unstructured thinking and dialogue, conversation, free-flow of thinking and easy communications between layers of the organisation.

Assumptions which inform one's commitment to diversity are deeply seated and are influenced by prejudices which in our times of political correctness, often seep underground rather than being openly voiced. Sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination based on differentials in power are deeply held ways of perceiving the world which will inevitably be subtly expressed through ways in which people interact. These interactions often occur in extremely subtle ways.

For instance, the sociologist Deborah Rowe conducted research in the 1990s into why women and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who had achieved senior managerial levels in organisations often did not remain in post for long. She discovered that they often experienced a form of 'micro-inequality' in terms of the gestures and body language extended to them by other senior executive members. She discovered that chief executives would often not look them directly in the eye, that small almost undetectable gestures – such as touching someone briefly on the shoulder – did not happen to them (Rowe,1990). As animals, we all have very subtle ways of letting one another know that we are accepted and valued in groups. The women and people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities often spoke of feeling isolated and alone, even though structures and policies had been created to support their presence in senior cadres of management. The feeling of being

included and valued, I would argue, is one that is experienced as an aesthetic quality – the quality of acceptance and interest which is essential to one's sense of belonging to a group.

Of course, this is a very difficult layer of interpersonal interaction to address. However, I would suggest that it provides a starting point for discussion among male senior managers who take seriously the need to bring more diversity to their tables. What are the values a senior team would have to hold in order to move beyond tokenism in its pursuit of increased diversity? How would it express those values in tangible ways which people could 'feel', as well as refer to in policy documents? Maybe just asking the question, 'What kind of aesthetic do we want to create together?' is a good place to start.

Conclusion

This article offers a new approach to achieving increased female participation within the highest ranks of organisational hierarchies. Experience demonstrates that even when organisations design and implement policies aimed at attracting – or enabling – women to fill these roles, if women do not 'feel' welcomed and valued, the chances are they will not remain in post for very long. The felt sense of belonging I have characterised here is an 'aesthetic' apprehension, a bodily-felt experience of whether or not one is included in a group. This might be evidenced by artefacts, such as photographs or ways in which work is organised, but most fundamentally this sense is created through the enactment of the deeply held assumptions and values held by the dominant group.

Such deeply held values do not change through legislation. Revealing them for what they are, and discussing their consequences for an organisation's ability to attract and retain talented female managers, is an important prerequisite for making meaningful change. Just as an organisation's aesthetic is subtly created, so it is subtly changed. The first step in initiating such a change would undoubtedly be attending to 'what it is now', and how that impression is created. Beginning to

make changes at the level of artefacts rather than assumptions might provide a more accessible entry point.

However, for organisations that are serious about creating an aesthetic of inclusivity, change can't stop there. They must continue by asking penetrating questions such as:

- what would we have to change about the way we collectively operate to create a culture in which difference was truly valued?
- how would such a shift be demonstrated in our decision making processes, our ways of interacting both formally and informally?
- what would we have to give up?

Bringing such questions to the surface might be the first step in creating an organisation in which all of its members would 'feel', not just believe, the opportunity existed for them to contribute at the highest levels.

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06 Black leadership and the white gaze

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This article draws on findings from a research project on the use of principles of truth and reconciliation in forwarding race equality in the arts as a starting point for exploring new ways of delivering race equality, fit for the 21st century. Based on the premise that the arts sector is persistently failing in race equality, it provides an analysis of why inequality exists and what conversations are needed to make the necessary changes.

The white gaze is a view of the world seen through the lens of the white perspective. It is present in most institutions and sectors, including the arts. As I write this, I cannot think of one area of our arts and creative industries that is not owned, defined and represented through the lens of the white gaze. The gaze is pervasive, defining cultural value and quality.

The gaze is not a new concept.

Toni Morrison describes it as 'the people in control' and she has spoken much of discovering her authentic voice only once the gaze had been erased from her landscape, saying that:

> … almost all of the African-American writers that I know were very much uninterested in one particular area of the world, which is white men. That frees up a lot. It frees up the imagination, because you don't have that gaze. And when I say white men, I don't mean just the character, I mean the establishment, the reviewers, the publishers, the people who are in control. So once you erase that from your canvas, you can really play (Morrison, 2008).

In retrospect, I can see that the white gaze has often denied me my authentic voice in my career. Its confines have meant that I have struggled to stay in the sector, to find a space that allows my perspective, opinion and intellect to be free. The space, as Morrison describes it, 'to play'. In many ways, my work in diversity has always been driven by this quest for freedom and recently I have become interested in cultural equality and what it would look like to have such a freedom of expression, outside of the white gaze.

I think that achieving freedom from the gaze is one of the keys to providing the level playing field that we long so much for in the arts. On the one hand, Black practitioners need to be aware of the effect of the gaze on their work, whilst 'those in control' need to be mindful of the impact of their cultural dominance.

So how do we do this? Our sector has had a long history of race inequality. The evidence is there in 32 years' worth of reports and statistics, starting with Naseem Khan's groundbreaking report *The Arts Britain Ignores* (1976) through to the 2008 Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP) report on Black, Asian and minority ethnic leadership in the creative and cultural sector.

The latter report surmised that:

> While many in the sector acknowledge the benefits of cultural diversity, achieving cultural diversity and race equality in the sector remains problematic. Although there has often been a lack of hard data to support claims, it is evident to many in the industry that ethnic minorities are under-represented in creative and cultural organisations, particularly in senior management and leadership roles (Bhandal et al., 2008).

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Footprint figures from Creative & Cultural Skills (2007) indicate that 3% of the 186,580 people employed in the arts are from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The CLP report goes on to say that:

> The footprint found very little variation, with BAME representation ranging from 3% to 5.3% across the sub-sectors… The data shows a consistent pattern of under-representation when compared to the national average (11.9%) of the BAME working age population (Bhandal et al., 2008).

My perspective is such that I do not need 'hard evidence' to know that 'achieving cultural diversity and race equality in the sector remains problematic'. I have the experience of working within the sector – the statistics just confirm my story. Yet I would like to know why, after 32 years of campaigning, race equality in the arts is still not working. After that many years, should we not be able to feel the difference of a new environment in our organisations, working practices and leadership? And surely, our conversations and approaches to race equality should have matured? On paper there is no reason why race equality hasn't succeeded or shouldn't succeed. We have had significant investment; we have the talent; we have flagship programmes; we have been race equality trained; and we are all keenly aware of the issues. All the components are in place to make equality happen. Yet somewhere between the intention and point of delivery there is persistent failure and we note again 'achieving cultural diversity and race equality in the sector remains problematic' (Bhandal et al., 2008).

For the past two years I have been researching why there is this persistent failure. I wanted to look at how we might have new conversations that bring us closer to achieving successful race equality within the arts.

The questions, for me, are less about what we do to achieve the level playing field, but more about why there isn't a level playing field in the first place – the root causes. It became apparent very early on in my research that the arts sector has built its race

equality programmes from the perspective of problem-solver. First, they identify a problem and then, move effortlessly to the position of problem-solver.

For example, identified problem: there are few Black leaders in our cultural institutions.

Solution: roll out a positive action/guest programmer/guest curator/in-residence programme.

This 'problem to problem-solver' approach rarely allows for much-needed critical dialogue in between. So dialogues around root causes or even where to find them, are rarely undertaken. It follows then, that if we begin to create spaces to have these kinds of conversations, we might begin to unearth why there is persistent failure in achieving race equality.

My research identifies four root causes in total, one of them being the white gaze, on which I focus in this paper. The gaze is very much like the canvas on which we paint our picture; no matter what medium we use, whatever image we produce, the canvas remains the same. It is always there, we may not focus on it, but it's there.

This unchanging canvas has had a huge effect on the lives and careers of many people I have known in the industry. Up and down the country, those who I count as my friends and peers, describe themselves as 'burnt out'. In my particular area of work, diversity, the phenomenon of 'another diversity casualty' in the workplace is not unusual. I have been one myself, becoming so worn down by persistent discrimination, that I was not only prepared to leave my diversity job, but my career and the sector as well.

I have heard countless personal stories that I believe play out the true tale of Black leadership in the arts. In 2005, I was part of a small group of officers who set up Arts Council England's first ever Black Workers' Group. It was here that the floodgates were opened for Black workers across the country to share our experiences of life in the arts. It was in this space that we had an unwritten understanding of each other through our stories.

We know what these stories are. Individually, they don't appear to say much and certainly not enough to warrant making a complaint. How does

my colleague express her unhappiness and the inappropriateness about somebody fluffing her afro at her desk? How does it feel to have people who look like you used in a funding application and described in the context of poverty; as being uneducated; having poor housing and low aspirations; and being in need of educating through the arts? What messages am I hearing about my place in society as described through the white gaze? What about the time when I turned up at a meeting with a white intern and was assumed to be the junior member of staff? What about when I was asked to attend the next event in 'traditional dress again'?

As long as these hidden stories of Black practitioners in the arts remain unrecorded, unrecognised and unheard, we remain invisible. In our stories we breathe life into the statistics and offer real evidence of why retention of Black leaders is an issue – and why I was ready to walk away from the arts in 2006.

> Often organisations seek out a more diverse pool of candidates and may be successful in recruitment but fail to recognise that the organisation – having sought out the 'different' – needs to change and support the person more effectively if they are to successful in the organisation. Retention is likely to become a major problem if there is not continued significant cultural change in many of the key organisations in the sector (Bhandal et al., 2008).

My story is that by 2006, I'd had enough. After 15 long years confined by the gaze, I was ready to walk away. The gaze had labelled me aggressive, and now I was angry. The gaze had consistently questioned my expertise, and now I had begun to question my own talent. Forget retention strategies: this is the time to talk about the survival strategies described by Kevin Osbourne in his research paper 'Bridging The Whole' (2008). Osbourne interviewed a number of Black leaders who spoke of the toll the sector had on their emotional and mental health. These are the stories we need to hear, and act on.

Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, highlighted the importance of this in saying,

'Everyone affected by racism has a story that should be heard' (2009).

If we look at working practices within the arts, and the effects of the white gaze on Black workers, we can see how the Black leader is slowly but surely compromised to such an extent that sooner or later they lose belief in the system and their role.

So how has the white gaze operated in my career? Let's take an example of a regular diversity strategy I have been employed to deliver. Here's the scenario:

I am employed by an organisation to deliver a race equality initiative on Black leadership. The organisation recognises there are issues, and so has devised a programme of work to respond to them. I am employed to deliver this piece of work, acting as a conduit between community and organisation. I am mindful of the organisation's mission statement, way of working, hierarchy and value system.

To set the context, there are few other Black workers in the organisation – so I am very much a lone voice. The programme I am working on represents a new area of work for the organisation. The people that I am commissioned to work with have either had a bad experience of working with this organisation or never worked with them before.

The success criteria for this piece of work has been defined by the organisation – on this occasion, more Black practitioners working in the mainstream sector. However, through the course of the programme, I recognise a need to change the project and in particular, redefine the destination point and success criteria. I find that many of the practitioners I meet do not want to work in the ways demanded by the mainstream, nor change methods of working in order to be accepted. And the struggle begins – the organisation has already set the starting and destination points, and most importantly, the success criteria cannot change. The white gaze has put me in a compromising position. Do I now battle for the authentic voice of the community, of which I am part, to be heard, or for the organisation that pays my bills? If I choose the latter, then I compromise myself, my work, my reputation and my identity. How much of myself am

I willing to lose in order to fulfil the organisation's values? I have a choice to stay – and remain compromised – or leave. My personal story is that I chose to leave.

Let's take a different scenario of a diversity project being run up and down the country on a daily basis. The organisation has identified a problem, for example: 'there are not enough diverse audiences participating in our work'. The organisation devises a solution to the 'problem' and translates this into a funding bid. The project is then delivered through a white-led organisation for impact at Black community level. Of course, community consultation will be built in and project delivery will more often than not be delivered by a short-term contract Black worker – who will have little power to change or influence the programme. Again, the destination point and success criteria have been set a long way back, and the Black worker becomes merely the delivery agent of a solution for the Black community, as seen through the lens of the white gaze.

Who gains in this situation? I argue that it is rarely the person at the end of the policy. It is the activity around the arts: the organisations, infrastructure, funders and the full-time workers. These are the winners. No matter how well-intentioned the work, by the time the project reaches community level, the white lens has defined the destination point, the delivery staff are disillusioned, the programmes have little follow on and it is time to move on to the next piece of problem-solving work.

The white gaze rarely stops to consider the emotional, moral and social impact it is having by delivering pieces of work. The story ends.

Here's what I mean by that. We can all recognise work like this:

Growing up in the inner city is perilous for many young people. Constantly receiving terrible press which paints them society's menace, the problem of disengaged youth can feel overwhelming. For five years [x arts organisation] has organised outreach sessions for volatile young people on an estate in South London. The [x] has partnered with

[y] which serves three large council estates in the heart of [z], one of London's poorest boroughs. Often criticised or vilified by society and the media, these young people come regularly to drop-in art sessions discovering talent, self esteem and a new identity as an artist. This programme proves that sustained attention, talented teachers and persistent commitment to the boys can deliver spectacular results. The works from this project are now a touring exhibition – even becoming *Time Out*'s Critics Choice (Anon).

Let us consider the white gaze in these short paragraphs.

Here is the white gaze talking to us, assuming that we are white and that we weren't brought up in these circumstances (I was). The organisation is taking it upon itself to explain to us, the reader, how the young people feel. Furthermore, the organisation exerts its greater cultural right (of having resource, space, majority cultural value, funding value) to over-print an alternative identity 'as an artist' on this group of people. The white gaze views the young people's identity as invisible, only visible once they transform themselves into artists.

Let us consider intention. I do not doubt the organisation's best intention, but I do question, who is this piece of writing written for? Funders? Core audience? Has the organisation ever considered the effect reading such words might have on the young people? Does the organisation take responsibility for the role it is playing in reinforcing the deep cultural and social divides that exist between those with greater cultural right and those without? Does this organisation understand how it is exploiting the stories of these young men? I ask again, who is benefiting here and how is the intention being acted on?

In this example, the destination point and project success have been predetermined and pre-constructed through the white gaze. According to the white gaze, success is in the enablement of a 'new identity as an artist', with the quality level set against the criteria of *Time Out*. Therefore, the white gaze has defined what success looks

like, what quality is. In doing so, the cultural background, stories and aspirations of the participant are negated, simplified and rendered invisible.

The importance of the gaze is that it allows a dominant group to control the social spaces and social interaction of all groups. Blacks are made visible and invisible at the same time under the gaze. For example, when Black youth are seen it is often with a specific gaze that sees the 'troublemaker', 'the school skipper' or the 'criminal'. Thus they are seen and constrained by a gaze that is intended to control physical and social movements. The purpose of the gaze is that it should subdue those who receive it and make them wish to be invisible (Fanon, 1967).

For me, there is a need for an honest, critical dialogue on issues around intention and point of delivery. The question is how we create the bold conversations that are truthful as well as non-judgemental. A space that does not render us vulnerable, but takes us to a place where we can build the foundations of a new, deeper and shared understanding.

As I stated earlier, I have spent the last two years researching how we might develop these new tools for race equality within the arts and this article represents a small part of that research.There is so much more to explore. For this reason, I am involved in the construction of www.Blackleadership.co.uk. Here, through the collation of ideas, opinion and experiences, we aim to identify the core themes in Black leadership today. One of our intentions is to build a body of stories that breathe life into the statistics, and I invite those who are willing to share theirs.

My thanks to this reader for giving me this space to share mine.

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07 Leadership in a matrix… or getting things done in more than one dimension

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September 2007. Formerly in the Royal Navy, he
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Museum, Greenwich (2000–7).

**This paper explores the benefits and
challenges of a matrix based organisation,
in which relationships between people
are nourished vertically, horizontally and
diagonally. In this structure there needs to be
a sense of shared values and a recognition
that contributions from all who work in the
organisation are to be valued: staff need to
be selected and supported appropriately.
The matrix model offers the opportunity for
organisations to be creative and innovative
and to realise the full potential of individuals
and teams, with the leader recognising their
role in assessing risk and making strategic
interventions.**

Introduction

This paper has been adapted from a piece I
created for use within the Museums, Libraries
and Archives Council (MLA) during a time of
substantial organisational change, based on a
new vision agreed with our board. I wanted to
prepare something for use by all staff at all levels,
to help everyone appreciate the culture and the
behaviours that the 'new MLA' is seeking to adopt.
The matrix approach I defined was preceded by
bottom-up debate and agreement about our
five organisational values (Making a Difference,
Innovation, Accountability, Respect and Working
Together) that evolved from staff, not leaders.
Feedback on the matrix has been positive and
constructive; the approach has enabled many staff
to tackle fresh professional relationships in flexible
and more productive ways.

People not structures

It is a truism that things are accomplished by people
and not by structures. Yet conventional models
of leadership often focus on organisational charts
illustrating functions in 'wiring diagrams', implying
top-down decision making involving interactions
between line managers and subordinates. There is
an underlying assumption that leadership occurs at
the top, and is itself top-down.

An assumed advantage of this kind of structure is
that it places responsibility appropriately. However,
this model also limits contributions from below and
can encourage people to work in 'silos'. This can
promote ego-building and a blame culture in which
failures are attributed to subordinates, who in turn
become defensive and risk averse.

In contrast, successful organisations encourage
innovation and creativity. They clearly value all the
people who work in them, knowing that good ideas
develop everywhere and are not the preserve of
the few at the top. In an organisation in which the
values include 'working together', 'accountability'
and 'respect', leadership exists at every level and
everyone in effect becomes a leader.

In these organisations, the working mechanism
is generally a matrix, in which relationships are
nourished vertically, horizontally and diagonally.
The details will vary between organisations and
within organisations over time, but the key
elements are consistent.

The vertical, horizontal and diagonal

The vertical plane is fundamental, both for the
leader and the led. Everyone needs a boss,
whether for mentoring, performance appraisal,
compassionate referral or as a route for appeal.
An overbearing, autocratic style suffocates, while

Valuing the contribution of all people is the core idea behind matrix leadership

too relaxed a regime, in which anything goes, confounds. Trust and confidence work in both directions: people need to lead up and down.

Horizontal relationships, between peers, can suffer from perceptions of competitiveness or favouritism. These aberrations are human, but should be discouraged as ego based activity. The overall climate of a matrix led organisation favours collaboration and positive teamwork. Shared values can foster a spirit in which the customer is the ultimate arbiter. Peer-to-peer contact has to be worked at; remote working and over-reliance on email can limit the development of resilient relations. Recognising the risk that lies in too little human contact is the first step towards building horizontal bridges.

Diagonal relationships, between departments and levels within organisations, are the most exciting drivers for improved delivery. An enterprise that encourages people to work diagonally is already one in which ego is supplanted by the common good. A successful matrix exists when line managers do not feel threatened by bright ideas from below; when credit is given to the person who makes a difference, rather than their boss; and when reactions to failure and omission are at once pragmatic and supportive. Diagonal relationships release the full potential of a team, triggering solutions and helping to step up the tempo of productivity.

Making the matrix work

A common understanding of goals is a prerequisite for a workable matrix. A guiding vision from the board, chief executive and senior leaders must be communicated and owned right across the enterprise. This enables a closer focus on what really matters for success, with priorities understood and interpreted flexibly. If an organisation is clear about its vision and purposes, it can promote its brand consistently and live by its values.

Accountability for overall strategy and communicating policy remains at the top. Those with ultimate responsibility need personal integrity

and the professional acumen to foster positive behaviours across their organisation. To be effective, they and their senior managers need an appreciation of the likelihood and impact of the risks associated with particular courses of action. They also require the courage to hold back and the judgement to know when and how to intervene in ways that stimulate and build empathy, focusing on creative outcomes that match the vision and deliver policy ends.

Matrix working practices have to be backed by top-level acceptance that results will sometimes fall short and recognition that occasional failure is an acceptable part of pushing boundaries, doing things differently and pressing forward innovatively. The key is to encourage people to think the unthinkable and to work together spontaneously to release creative energy with no fear of unwarranted reprisals. Everyone must be clear how performance will be assessed and matrix leadership places demands on every individual in the workplace, whatever their level of activity. Satisfaction from achieving success is shared by everyone, which in turn feeds a sense of corporate responsibility and job satisfaction.

For staff within a matrix, expectations can at first seem challenging for individuals and potentially unsettling for teams. The relative certainty of top-down, vertical relationships is replaced by a series of dynamic relationships in more than one plane. People are expected to take a lead on achieving their own linkages sideways and diagonally. Implementation of matrix leadership takes time and encouragement to build confidence and mutual trust. A matrix workplace may not suit some temperaments, so organisations need to think carefully about recruitment, induction and support for continuing professional development.

The values that underpin and guide progress will be generated from within, not top-down. Regardless of the market pressures it may face, a matrix led organisation is one at ease with itself, acting ethically through an inclusive code that induces self-confidence, without arrogance or complacency. The positive behaviours evident in the workplace will derive from the example shown

by the board and chief executive and permeate all levels and all departments.

Conclusion

The matrix suits organisations with an open culture, in which professional judgement is valued at every level and counts for more than the application of strict procedural hierarchies. Valuing the contribution of all people is the core idea behind matrix leadership. My personal leadership style has always been to encourage the voices of 'junior' and younger people, with still-forming ideas, alongside those who are more experienced. An organisation is on the pathway to success when outcomes belong to everyone and when each and every person is involved in making a difference, thinking creatively, setting the pace and encouraging people to do more than they think they can.

08 Relationships are at the heart of good cultural leadership

Caroline Norbury
Chief Executive, South West Screen

Caroline Norbury has extensive experience of the media industry as a producer, director and commissioning executive. Prior to the establishment of South West Screen, Caroline ran First Take Films, an agency dedicated to developing new talent based at Anglia Television. Caroline is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a member of BAFTA and was recently awarded an MA in Cultural Leadership from City University, London.

This article is based upon earlier work I conducted while studying for an MA in Cultural Leadership at City University, and contains reflections that result from both academic study and professional experience. It reflects on key leadership theories and examines the implications for cultural leaders during a time of change and uncertainty. The role of technology, the increase in uncertainty and the important role cultural leaders play in connecting disparate and diverse communities is discussed. The article explores how growing complexity requires leaders to put the needs of audiences and stakeholders – their followers – to the forefront and to ensure that relationships and authenticity are central to their behaviour.

Introduction

Stories of leadership from the heroic tradition of the Greeks through to those of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions, paint a picture of heroes and leaders as people who 'take on' others and move their people, both physically and emotionally, from one place to another. This idea of the 'Great Man' (and yes, it is predominantly a man) provides the basis of early thinking about leadership, that leaders are leaders by virtue of their innate qualities: they are born, not made. This view relies on an 'essentialist' foundation and the lack of any examinable criteria makes it difficult to examine, debate, dispute or affirm.

This highly individualist hypothesis of leadership formed the basis of a slightly more complex understanding of leadership – that of key 'traits' being evident in leaders. Although academics and professionals in leadership studies have identified a plethora of traits and skills as key characteristics of leaders, it is widely accepted that no *definitive* set of traits can be identified. Indeed, Richard Stodgil, one of the leading writers in this field, notes the characteristics identified include virtually all positive human attributes: 'from ambition to zest for life' (Stogdill, 1994).

Fred Fiedler developed a model of leadership theory which argued that a leader's effectiveness was the result of two facets – 'leadership style' and 'situational favourableness' – distinguishing between those leaders who were task-led and those who were relationship-led (Fiedler,1967). Central to Fiedler's theory was the belief that the personality and motivation of the leader played a key role in the interaction that took place between leaders and followers. A particularly important aspect of Fiedler's contribution to leadership theory was his identification of the emotional space between leaders and their co-workers as a key factor in leadership style.

Many critics have argued that this is not perhaps the most accurate way of measuring leadership effectiveness. However, it is an important tenet which helps us to understand the function of relationships between leaders and followers. Fiedler concluded that different competencies were required for different situations and he used the continuum of the 'task' and 'relationship' approach as a yard-stick for deciding what was most appropriate in differing contexts. The task-orientated leader, for example, is successful if 'getting things done' is the expected outcome. Fiedler cites highly structured working environments – such as within the 'blue collar' workforce, where people need to know exactly what to do and when – where this type of leadership is preferred over a more relationship-oriented style. In other environments – where tasks are less structured and outcomes defined, but the process of achieving them is freer – a more 'considerate' style of leadership is given preference.

Constant change requires a new type of leader – one who is able to make sense of change and adapt to rapidly changing environments

There are ramifications here for the cultural leader, who is often working in an environment of heightened sensitivity: people care deeply about what it is they are making or engaged in. The production of a piece of theatre, a film or an artwork is generally not process driven, but comes from applied endeavour, thought and reflection. In such a scenario, a leadership style which is based on empathy and understanding and which nurtures individuality (and maybe even eccentricity) is going to be more productive than one driven by the need to 'task and finish'.

Cultural leadership – managing change and complexity

The goal of transformational leadership is to transform people and organizations in a literal sense – to change them in mind and heart; enlarge vision, insight and understanding; clarify purposes; make behaviours congruent with beliefs, principles and values; and bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating and momentum building (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

Change is the essence of the late 20th century and early 21st century paradigm. The pace of change that drives modern organisations requires a more flexible and adaptable style of leadership. Change has also characterised the cultural sector in that it has developed to incorporate a mixed economy approach and become more and more business-like. The need for adaptive leadership, as advocated by Bernard Bass, confirms how constant change requires a new type of leader – one who is able to make sense of change and adapt to rapidly changing environments. Bass undertook a series of studies to rate transactional leadership against transformational leadership. He showed a positive correlation among those leaders who encouraged their staff to strive for new challenges, empowered them and treated them with respect and sensitivity, as against transactional leaders who exchanged rewards, criticism or sanctions for performance. The transformational approach was also found to

result in superior financial performance, as well as in staff reporting significantly higher levels of job satisfaction, motivation, morale and performance.

In their study of American army platoons, Bass and his colleagues examined the continuum between transactional and transformational leadership (Bass et al., 2003). They concluded that it took *both* active transactional and transformational leadership to result in successful performance. Bass argues that transactional contingent-reward relationships form the basis of relationships between leaders and followers because they specify the framework in which the relationship operates. Expectations are set, responsibilities clarified and therefore delivery is clear. However, leaders who are transformational enhance the development of the followers and their performance improves correspondingly. Followers are challenged to think in new ways, operate with a greater sense of ownership and are more self-motivated. This 'added value' is especially important in times of stress and unpredictability – hence the potency of the platoon surveys.

Most studies of transformational (and transactional) leadership are based in either highly process-oriented organisations or military situations. This 'top-down' approach, with the leader at the centre of all activity, is now under challenge from those who argue that in a world increasingly beset by change, complexity and interconnectedness, leadership does not only rest at the top; it is also 'distributed' at different places and with different people within organisations. Most cultural organisations are small, nimble and fleet of foot. They frequently grow from the grassroots; their members are committed and often possessive. Hierarchical leadership does not sit well in these situations, particularly when, as is common, expectations of artistic merit are high and resources stretched. Cultural leaders can never afford to lose touch with their audience and stakeholders. While there will always be debate about the balance between the primacy of the idea and its place in the market place, creators can only exist if they have an audience. Surely it is a central tenet of anyone working in the cultural sector to respond to the

needs of the audience and serve that audience.

The leader who acts from the perspective of serving others first and foremost has a long tradition. The characteristics of such a servant-leader include asking questions in order to seek solutions, rather than giving orders; earning respect and understanding through engagement; acting as a broker or match-maker, rather than being at the central point of all decision making; and seeking to find real common understanding between people rather than just wanting consensus to deliver outcomes. There are famous examples of servant-leaders from Jesus to Gandhi and this model of leadership has had centuries of support within religious institutions. However, its emphasis on higher purposes and its commitment to modelling behaviour and authenticity is analogous with a transformational approach. The servant-leader is the shaper or engine of relationships, rather than the leader of them, placing these relationships at the heart of their endeavour.

In this paradigm, the leader acts as a nurturer, with an approach based on clear moral principles. The leader encourages and coaches, rather than directs, with a central mission to coax out the leader within others. This may appear highly idealistic when we consider the history of leaders such as Hitler, Napoleon and Mao Tse Tung. However, *successful* leaders differ from rulers and commanders by virtue of the *nature and status* of their relationships with their followers.

Leadership is not simply about leaders. Leadership is an essentially social phenomenon – without followers there are no leaders (Grint, 2001).

In his book *The Arts of Leadership* (2001), Keith Grint argues that leadership cannot be studied as a science: rather, it is a myriad of different arts. His central thesis is that the concept of leadership is constructed in the imagination of the follower, because it asks the follower to imagine an outcome that doesn't exist at present. In this paradigm, relationships between leaders and followers form the core of the leadership faculty. Solidarity and talk are essential elements in Grint's theory of

leadership. He stresses the importance of pulling people together and the need for the leader constantly and consistently to involve people in conversation, because this engenders inclusivity, consensus, democracy and understanding.

So we return again to the crucial relationship between leader and follower and the need for the leader to earn the consent of the follower. Grint investigates the notions of leadership through a series of historical case studies from Florence Nightingale through to Richard Branson. Although his central line of enquiry is focused on what leaders do, his conclusions ultimately place the responsibility for their success or failure on followers. In his case study of Hitler, for example, he acknowledged that Hitler's partial success as a leader was because millions of people wanted to help him succeed (Grint, 2001). However, he concludes:

That Hitler ultimately failed can be traced, in part, to the fear that he engendered in others. As we have seen many times, all leaders make mistakes. But a critical difference between success and failure lies in the extent to which subordinates can compensate for the errors of their leaders – and in Hitler's case this was progressively delimited as the war continued (Grint, 2001).

In short, Grint's case studies show that successful leaders are the ones whose followers are able to bail them out. He conceives of leaders who are responsible to their followers, who pull rather than push and 'share the way', rather than show the way.

This is not because such an approach is more liberal or more humane, but because leaders who recognize their fallibility and operate on that basis are likely to succeed in the long run. It is followers that save leaders and therefore make them (Grint, 2001).

This need to ensure 'buy in' from your followers is increasingly significant in today's connected and connective world. Our interdependence places more

For the cultural leader in particular, the ability to reflect on the changing needs of audiences, participants, artists and creators is paramount. The leader-centric model appears less appropriate in a world that is networked and interdependent

and more emphasis on the need to develop and maintain different levels of relationships with others. This is particularly important as our organisations and societies become increasingly demographically diverse and as relationships between people become more critical to the realisation of success. It is easy to see, therefore, why diverse teams improve performance, often making high quality decisions through thorough reflection and an understanding of a more diverse set of views.

For the cultural leader in particular, the ability to reflect on the changing needs of audiences, participants, artists and creators is paramount. The leader-centric model appears less appropriate in a world that is networked and interdependent. Just as the invention of the printing press spurred on the movement to democracy in the West, so the increasing rate of access to learning and information will have further consequences for the governed. In her essay 'Connective Leadership – A New Paradigm' (1997), Jean Lipman-Blumen isolates technology as the driver that is moving the world towards increasing collaboration, networks and coalitions which 'seek out similarities and promotes universalism'. As a consequence, individualistic leadership is ineffective and outmoded.

Technology both facilitates and complicates global interdependence. Like the rest of us, leaders are not immune to the effects of interdependence; the scope, speed and impact of their decision making are held hostage to it (Lipman-Blumen, 1997).

Decisions that are made in other continents can have an immediate effect and impact on our own local environment, resulting in an increasing need for collaboration and tolerance of a diversity of views, experiences and expectations. Leaders of the 21st century need the ability to manage diversity and complexity. They need the capacity for dialogue, communication and tolerance, which are not necessarily the 'traits' that are often quoted in traditional individualistic models of leadership. Lipman-Blumen proposes that in a world of increasing diversity, we fear losing our identity and therefore increase our need to assert our

individuality, consequently 'these opposing forces – interdependence and diversity – actually intensifies the need for the other' (Lipman-Blumen, 1997).

Lipman-Blumen labels this new age the 'Connective Era', where the most important skills are the ability to include and connect, and to manage diversity and the complexity of relationships. The facility for anyone to speak to anyone else on the information superhighway has resulted not only in a diversity of voices and audiences, but also the development of the 'niche' and the specialist. It will become increasingly important for leaders to pull people and their objectives together – to seek commonality and deliver understandings which enable diversity and difference to thrive. Culture in this context is often an effective and appropriate space for this melting together. Connective leaders will need to rely more and more on others to relay their ideas and values; they will need to see connections everywhere in order to foster a sense of belonging and identify the common ground in views that could be seen as opposing. At the heart of the 'Connective Era' is a leader who values relationship as the most important commodity.

A personal perspective

My experience has often been to establish organisations, to initiate programmes and to manage change, charting new territories within an increasingly complex environment. I have exhibited different behaviours and leadership styles depending on the context; sometimes these have been transformational and sometimes managerial.

I have found that trusting people and expecting them to act decently; delegating authority and decision-making; and creating a climate where initiative is rewarded, does produce more motivated employees and better results. It also develops the intangible assets that leadership models often overlook: goodwill; a strong sense of commitment from followers; and a loyalty, not just to the leader, but to the organisation and its values.

A heightened transformational approach is most appropriate in a time of change, when there is a

need to recharge energies, face tough challenges and enter a period of uncertainty. In these situations, people need to take Grint's argument 'that leadership is constructed in the imagination' (2001) very seriously. You are asking people to trust your ideas and, fundamentally, your judgement. This isn't something that will happen overnight. You need to have displayed many of Bass's characteristics in terms of an 'authentic and moral' approach beforehand if you are to have any hope of leading change.

Lynn Offerman (1997) stresses the importance of 'Time, Trust and Training', which my experience has borne out. The decisions I have made when consultation has not been authentic or where my personal engagement with employees not entirely heartfelt, have led to less than positive outcomes. That is not to say those decisions were not right – usually they were. However, the ability to take others with me was lost. These occasions were missed opportunities for capitalising on increasing morale and trust.

Authentic and servant-leader leadership models are derived from an ethical approach to leadership. At their heart is a commitment to honesty and integrity: to 'walking the walk' and not just 'talking the talk'. Importantly, they all put the relationship between leader and follower at their heart. Lipman-Blumen provides an adjunct to this when she talks about 'denatured Machiavellianism' (Lipman-Blumen, 1997). This is a state where leaders are driven by a strong moral and ethical 'compass' and need to move within a chaotic and unpredictable environment. They negotiate this turbulence by exploiting people and events, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the community or organisation. Lipman-Blumen notes that used in 'good faith', this capacity enables leaders to manage complexity, diversity of viewpoints and expectations and to harness energy and opportunity.

These leaders focus more pragmatically on their instrumental skills in order to turn the connections among people, organizations and dreams to the advantage of the world around them (Lipman-Blumen, 1997).

A leader's authenticity is key to managing this complexity. Authenticity needs to come from an ethical core and is useless unless accompanied by accountability and a commitment to scrutiny by stakeholders in all their forms – from shareholders and financiers through to employees and customers.

My experience as a manager, leader, mother, wife, daughter and sister is that there are ever more stakeholders and relationships to manage, resulting in an ever increasing level of accountability. In addition, technological driven change has made the world more connected and complex. With more relationships to hold at more points of the organisation and within one's own personal and emotional life, leadership has to be distributed and collaborative. If flexibility and adaptability, trust in others and a commitment to authenticity are the only way to manage complexity and change, what does this mean for future leaders?

There seems to be an increasing consensus on the need for authenticity in leadership and a commitment to moral values. In our 'Connective Era' with a greater number of stakeholders and levels of scrutiny, it is more and more difficult to hide the truth, as many large corporations and governments are finding. Increasing diversity means that leaders are frequently required to 'hold' complexity and create the space for an ongoing conversation between players. Relationships with honesty at their centre are at the heart of good leadership; legitimate leadership, in turn, depends on the assumption of an honest contract. Central to these leadership skills is the ability to be self-aware; to have a relationship with yourself; to undertake self-scrutiny; to be confident in and aware of your motivations; to understand your relationship with others; and to be led by the benefit to the whole, rather than the advantage to yourself.

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09 Exiled in paradise

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In 2007, I bought a contemporary photographic work *Exiled in Paradise II* by Brian Reed, when I had just voluntarily resigned from a job, didn't have another one to go to and should have been conserving all my pennies. The work was a cut-out photograph of a mountain range on a brilliantly sunny day, with tracks of skiers coming down the slopes and trees in the foreground. Then suddenly you spot, superimposed onto the photo, the incongruous sight of some small figures wading through armpit-deep snow. A smartly dressed man in a suit and tie is followed by three other people in long, brightly coloured flowing robes riding donkeys. What were they doing? They didn't fit. Or did they? That is sometimes how leadership can feel. You're alone and not sure if you are heading in the right direction. But often you are. This is what I explore in my paper.

Exiled in Paradise II
Brian Reed, 2007

I had my first career in the Lloyd's insurance market. I started as an office junior with a few O Levels under my belt and 15 years later was the Managing Director of a non-marine insurance broking firm (i.e. insuring everything except ships and aeroplanes). Going from bottom to top was an illuminating experience, as was working in the City in the 1980s where seeing a woman was a rarity. You didn't just feel on the outside, you were. Management training was a dirty word; leadership didn't even seem to exist as a concept.

However, I cannot imagine a more fertile training ground for a later career in the arts. I have often said to younger people starting out in their careers that the best place to soak up information about leadership is when you are in the most junior position. It is the time when no-one pays much attention to you, which is perfect for watching, listening, noting, learning and remembering all the experiences you see going on around you. It was probably the time when I learnt the most.

I was intensely curious about how and why the bosses did things. I asked lots of questions, read all the files, listened to all the conversations, even if I didn't really understand the language that was being spoken. From those early days, the ways of working I admired, and the ways of working I admired less, have stayed with me. In the fast-moving Lloyd's insurance market I learnt quickly: who the leaders were; who people wanted to do business with; how playing to the gallery often made you popular but

not always the most shrewd operator; how to get the best out of the numerous different people you saw every day and did business with; how to achieve things without being one of the boys; and how to lead a team of men who in many cases didn't want to be led by a woman, i.e. you.

But most importantly for me, I learnt that the City was not the environment in which I wanted to be for the rest of my career. Despite my success, the City style didn't generally appeal to me. It left little room for different opinions – or indeed much opinion at all – other than that from the leader. I struggled to be the whole of me, feeling I had to conform to a set of values that just didn't fit. So I jumped off the precipice and started again in the arts, some 15 years ago.

Starting again was a shock: not being able to make decisions at will, not being able just to get things done. There is a good deal of freedom in being the boss, as well as moments of feeling alone. Most people aren't the boss, so it is a humbling thing to start from the bottom again, as well as a good reminder of what it is like.

Learning points:

- if you are early on in your career, relish the moment to look, listen, learn and ask questions
- if you are later on in your career and uncertain whether the world you are in is for you, it probably isn't. Making changes and jumping out of something is always nerve-wracking and induces a great amount of fear. But thinking about it is usually worse than actually doing it
- remember the feeling of stress you may have had in a job where you had little control over what went on. So, when in a position of leadership, consciously think about this for others. It makes a big difference to how you work

Paying attention

My first lesson about leadership actually came about before my City job, when I was at college training to be a nanny. Some weeks into our first term, we had

to vote for a leader. I had no idea whom to vote for and couldn't seem to get a feel from others about their choice. I was completely taken aback to find it was me. However, not as taken aback as after the second vote at the end of the first year, which usually re-confirmed the appointment, when I was voted out. I was hugely embarrassed.

I mention this because it was a lesson that I didn't pay attention to the role bestowed on me. I took no care with it. My misplaced sense was that I was both very low-key and egalitarian about the role: very humble, as I saw it. In fact, I think that translated into seeming not to care, not involving the key people who would strongly support me in decisions and not providing a clear sense of the important issues for the rest of the group.

All of which were things the next leader did, and continued to do, until the end of our time there. I can remember thinking, 'I could never do that', when watching her deftly handle many differing opinions or come round and talk to people about their view, but then make a final decision in such a way that even those who didn't take that same view were not aggrieved. It was a lesson in both skilful diplomacy and paying attention well that I have long remembered.

Learning point:

- what you may think is low key leadership, others can see as rudderless floundering

Humility

This is a word often bandied about in relation to leadership and leaders. I said above I thought I was being humble as a leader, but in fact I was not. I just didn't really know how to be the leader at that time. Some very inspiring people I have met since have been truly humble. One was an extraordinary young man I met on a Leaders' Quest trip to Szechuan Province in China a few years ago, someone who had worked with Action Aid on a couple of projects with villages in very remote areas.

When we arrived in one of these villages, he was

greeted like a king by everyone. He was a small, ordinary looking, quietly spoken young man who seemed almost oblivious of his leadership qualities, whilst exhibiting them so clearly. He told us the story of his projects. It had taken him almost a year to get the village together to make a simple concrete bridge to enable them to reach their crops more easily, as there was so much disagreement about how to do it. He was determined *they* would do it, rather than him. He was simply there, as he explained, to help create the sense that they saw it was possible.

He also encountered great resistance from many of the villagers about making reed pipes to ensure their culture of music didn't die out. Many people wanted to move on to make more contemporary music. He was quietly determined to reach his goal, even if others couldn't understand how he was going to achieve it. As he was not a local man, he was often seen as 'in the wrong clothes, on the wrong mountain'. But eventually he created the right environment and the villagers all pulled together to do things for themselves; the bridge was built and the bamboo pipes were turned into instruments producing fascinating musical sound. He was feted as a hero.

This reminded me of the tenacity you so often need in the arts, working against the prevailing tide – or sometimes being swept along with it if you hit a fashionable moment, which can be just as awkward. You are often working, as this Chinese leader was, with little money, little peer support and sometimes uncertainty about how you are ever going to reach your goal. He was the quiet unsung hero in the background – achieving things without fanfare or fuss.

Learning point:

- keep your eyes open for the people who might seem the less noticeable leaders. Quiet does not mean 'not a leader': often the reverse. Once you've spotted them, ensure they get more opportunities to be the leader in an appropriate way

Listening…well

This is something I think I now do much better than I used to. Although many years ago I would probably have described myself as a good listener, I probably just listened to the top notes but not to the smaller, quieter passages between – and didn't listen well enough for what was *not* said.

An experience some years ago in my theatre days springs to mind. I needed a specific result from a meeting, as lack of agreement was going to have a detrimental effect on many other people, causing a good deal of stress. And I wasn't getting it. Only when I had left the meeting, rather bad-tempered at the outcome and probably quite disrespectful to the other person, did it occur to me to stop and listen back to what they had been saying: or rather, not saying. I had completely overlooked the listening part of the meeting, as I was so busy waiting for the part where we would get to the agreement I so badly needed, which never came.

Some weeks later, and with the help of a coach, I could see clearly that what I needed from the meeting was not in the other party's interests. Agreement was never going to be possible, but my lack of listening and generally rather uncooperative behaviour had also blown the prospect of us getting back together and having another go. This was a very salutary lesson and one that could have had quite bad consequences.

I was lucky that through a mixture of a 'small correction' and a 'handbrake turn' (see below) and the considerable help of my coach, I opened myself up to be able to listen well to some advice from a very wise colleague. This gave me the ability to develop a very different – and successful – 'plan B'.

Learning point:

- don't disregard ideas that might be quite different from your own. Different can work

Small corrections and handbrake turns

I heard both these expressions recently and liked them. 'Handbrake turns' was a phrase being used

I am still sometimes in situations where I am uncertain whether I know what I am doing: but if I don't, I usually know where to go to find someone who does

to describe seemingly disconnected career moves; 'small corrections' was a euphemism for the odd errors we sometimes make. My career to date seems to have been a mixture of both, from which I have learnt hugely.

I have changed the direction of my life about four times now: from the City to the arts, from visual arts to theatre, from the arts to the Arts Council, from the Arts Council to the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Each role and each place has been very different, in terms of size, scale, culture and the position I have held.

I went from running a City broking firm (whilst doing my degree in the evening), to working three days a week in an art gallery, with a 90% reduction in salary; then from working with artists and persuading chief executive officers of public limited companies to sponsor major projects at the Royal Academy, to being project champion at the Almeida (where they turned a bus depot into two temporary theatres and refurbished the main theatre); and then from running an office of 130 staff with a budget to match at Arts Council England, London, to starting again at London 2012 with no dedicated budget and two seconded members of staff.

I have now had considerable practice along the way at being flexible, agile and good at picking up new skills at high speed, as well as working with people with an array of personalities and from widely differing backgrounds and cultures. But these changes have also required reflection from me: not easy when working in the arts. If training and leadership were alien concepts in the City of the 1980s, having enough time, space and money often seems to be as alien in the arts of the early 21st century. In addition, there aren't really clear career ladders in the arts; you always seem to have to create your own. This is not necessarily always a bad thing, but it can be time-consuming, disruptive and emotionally exhausting.

Over the years, I have also been able to observe leadership in many different forms. This has stood me in very good stead, particularly after my last move from the Arts Council where I had to rediscover what leadership meant, and how to do it, without being the boss. It is probably one of the

most difficult changes I have made, and I am not sure I would have been able to accomplish it if I hadn't done a few handbrake turns beforehand.

Learning points:

- understanding a range of different environments broadens and hones your skills, keeps you on your toes and means you never stop learning
- don't be put off by the odd comments you may get along the lines of 'But what do they know about that?' As a good leader, you will always gather round you the very best team who certainly do know everything there is to know about any given subject

Places of discomfort

You may feel from reading this that, with all the handbrake turns, I don't have many places where I am uncomfortable. This is not the case. Each move has filled me with a certain amount of dread and anxiety; each new role makes me question whether I can do it, and fear whether this is where I get found out. I am still sometimes in situations where I am uncertain whether I know what I am doing; but if I don't, I do usually know where to go to find someone who does.

When I have been in a place of discomfort, I now know not to muddle through alone. Apart from the luck of having a small number of senior people who act as wonderful sounding boards and informal mentors for me (several of whom, in years gone by, I was in awe of even speaking to), I have had some of the most invaluable help through coaching. Good coaching and personal development, whether one-to-one or in groups with other leaders, can sometimes be an uncomfortable experience. I have found that to make coaching really work, you have to face yourself head on and confront some of those personal blind spots which often cause professional blockages.

I used to think it was rather an indulgence to have a coach and preferred mentoring or informally coaching others. I was wrong. I have only emerged

from many of my tightest spots, those where I have been almost rooted to the spot with indecision or questioned my own abilities, with the help of some excellent coaching and personal learning.

Learning points:

- never be afraid to ask for help. If some form of coaching or mentoring is offered, snap it up – but do make sure the chemistry works between you and your coach
- search out fellow like-minded travellers and use each other for mutual advice and mentoring support

A sense of yourself

This is an important aspect that for me has only come over time. My sense of self has also enabled me to be a much more effective leader than I was when I was in my first top leadership role as a managing director in the City many years ago. Looking back, I think I was quite brittle. I certainly didn't want to ask for help and, possibly exacerbated by being one of so few women in a very male, quite old-fashioned world, was trying so hard to prove myself. I never allowed myself proper time to think about how, what or why I was doing things.

Since the various changes which followed the City, I think I have become more and more clear about myself: my strengths and weaknesses; what I am good at and what I am not; where my pressure points are and how to handle them. I no longer feel I need to know everything as I did many years ago. I am completely delighted to spend more time now creating the right environment, so that others who do know more than I do are working with me.

As the leader, you need to know when to intervene, to make decisions, to see the sometimes hidden opportunities or connections which others cannot. That means not always feeling you have to make everything happen, but keeping an eye out for the moment when your input or insight will help: sometimes leading from the front, sometimes from behind.

Colleagues have said of me over the years that they have found my leadership both inspiring and refreshing. But on the days when I feel singularly lacking in any inspiration at all, I try to remember this below:

Learning point:

- don't keep relying on your old strategies to solve new problems. Strategies need to change as you change and grow as a person and a leader. Relax, smile, enjoy yourself. Opportunities to be a leader are usually immensely stimulating, rewarding and good fun. Make the most of them

Exiled in paradise

And so to end, back at where I started. I look at my photograph and laugh at the ridiculousness of this troop of people struggling up through the snow, totally ill-equipped for their journey. But maybe they know something I don't. The ones following behind their leader either:

- believe that he does know what he is doing and are prepared to back him, despite the incongruity, or;
- always follow him whatever he says he is going to do, or;
- are all trying out the latest brand new, wafer-thin snow gear under their clothes.

We just do not know. Whatever the answer, the work connects very strongly to me. It always reminds me very powerfully that, however big we think we are, against the might of the mountains we are very small indeed: a thought I find a curiously comforting.

Final learning point:

- know yourself, be yourself, look after yourself. Everything else will follow.

10 Leadership development: a critical question

This paper looks at the issue of leadership development and considers why we should care about developing cultural leaders. Drawing on critical theory and critical pedagogy, it encourages a long hard look at some underlying assumptions and considers what it is about learning and leadership development that appears to make them be regarded as universally beneficial and apolitical. In looking at the ambiguities of leadership, it also considers the nature of the cultural sector and whether leadership is something which can be 'done out loud and proud'. I go on to ask how we, as practitioners, support 'leaders' in confronting what is taken for granted. This paper is both conceptually based and highly personal, deliberately reflecting some of my values, beliefs and experiences.

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Dawn Langley is an independent consultant specialising in organisational development, evaluation and organisational learning. She is undertaking a PhD at the University of Surrey, researching the multi-modal nature of learning and the aesthetics of organisations. She has written and presented numerous conference papers and primarily works with arts based research methods.

Introduction

The Manifesto for Tyneside Upon England

Friends. I am inventing a life in which your ingredients are returned to you!
Our lives are run by car parks, carrier bags, suits and credit cards.

So, from this evening I am removing power from our city leaders
and this city shall be run by its artisans and makers, by bread-kneaders
and stone masons, sculptors and chocolate fanciers, by egg painters
and flower arrangers, blacksmiths and conjurors.

The old leaders shall go to the great hall, where they shall be asked to cut up their suits and make them again.

And I am confiscating all luxury flats and offices and giving them rent free to artists and makers.

All property developers shall report to the great hall for retraining in creative play...

(Julia Darling, 2004)

Julia Darling may not have known it at the time – although I am sure her intentions were to disrupt – but she was beautifully articulating a critical practice that could, and should, be applied to management, leadership and learning. One particular line resonated so profoundly with me that the imagery has stayed with me ever since.

The old leaders shall go to the great hall, where they shall be asked to cut up their suits and make them again.

In my mind's eye, the 'great hall' is a high-ceilinged, wood-panelled, marble-pillared building, probably quite dark: a monument to some bygone civic pride. It has paintings of past 'great leaders' on the wall, framed in gnarly gilt. Queuing, as if a writhing snake, are men in navy suits. At the head of the queue are trestle tables with sewing machines burbling. To one side is another table of people with scissors cutting randomly at navy fabric. Men in their underwear are given haphazard shapes before positioning themselves at a sewing machine. The room reverberates with unfamiliar sounds; there is rising anxiety as comfortable uniforms are cast aside. I could go on...
This caused me to stop and wonder, who are these old leaders and who might be the new ones? What would it mean to cut up our suits as leaders? Why was the image that came to me of men in navy suits? After all, I have seldom worked with

Leadership is a human construct and we should not forget that

many of them in the cultural sector. But I have noticed that when something important happens, they tend to appear, as if bussed in for the day. All this showed me that, no matter how strongly I might protest otherwise, I carry some pretty well embedded notions of leadership and anti-leadership.

Taking a critical perspective helps us to explore some of these assumptions. It is an approach that has grown in prominence in terms of management, pedagogy and, latterly, human resource development. In whichever field it is applied, a critical perspective is likely to have a number of characteristics (Trehan, 2007):

- questioning assumptions and taken-for-granteds, asking questions that are not meant to be asked
- foregrounding processes of power and noting how inequalities of power intersect with social factors such as race, gender, class or age
- identifying competing discourses and the sectional interests reflected in them, and ultimately
- developing a workplace and social milieu characterised more by justice than by inequality or exploitation

This paper tries to adopt such a critical approach and questions some of the 'taken-for-granteds' that might exist in relation to leadership development. I begin by taking a more questioning view of learning, followed by an exploration of 'leadership' as a human construct. Then I examine 'leadership' in the cultural sector, characterised as it so often is by passion and mission. I hope this paper makes a useful contribution in exploring what it may mean to challenge some deeply held assumptions and proposing that we would benefit from an approach which exposes the ambiguities, tensions, inequalities and contradictions in the business of leadership.

Learning: part of the furniture?

A couple of years ago, I was in conversation with someone I would regard as an influential leader in her artistic field. We were discussing the state of the sector and the kinds of behaviour we were experiencing from some of our emerging figures. 'What the hell are we teaching people in this sector?' she asked rhetorically.

It is a question that has lingered with me. While I am someone who is completely committed to learning and development in many forms, I have held a rising sense of disquiet as a raft of initiatives and programmes have proliferated in the cultural sector, particularly those with a focus on leadership development. I have become increasingly intrigued about the differences such initiatives are making and how far a genuine sense of learning and development has penetrated the sector. I have also been concerned about the somewhat individualistic nature of much of what I have observed.

There is a danger, it seems to me, that the notion of learning, in which I would include 'development', is generally regarded as benign and beneficial. It has become such a core part of our discourse that it is embedded as an almost common sense given. Imagine being the 'leader' who says, 'This is not a project or organisation that seeks to learn!'

> The universal and uncritical acceptance of learning shows just how far the ideological move of appropriating and suturing a notion of society, organisation and self around learning has gone (Contu et al., 2003: 947).

As if to prove the point, learning is high on political, social and cultural agendas. We have learning cities and learning corridors – and, in Wales, we even have a learning country. There have been many wide ranging, publicly funded initiatives. 'Lifelong' learning has become part of the furniture. Its siren call beckons, offering us empowerment, independence, freedom, employment, choice and self-fulfilment.

These are not small claims and yet we (and I include myself in this) have been complicit in these

promises. What we hear much less often is that learning and development are political, subject to power relationships, revealing of 'uncomfortable' knowledge, discriminatory, anxiety provoking and the subject of mixed messages in certain organisations or work settings.

Who has ever been on a course over which they felt they had little choice? Who has been part of a 'sheep-dip' process that seemed to take little account of their existing skills, experience and knowledge? Who has brought some great learning back to their organisation only to be told that, 'This is not the way we do things around here'?

> As a result of their experience within training events, several of the front-line workers and junior managers have acted in more authoritative and autonomous ways, much to the annoyance of some of their own line managers who – while being supportive of their individual learning – quietly resent having their views or decisions directly questioned or challenged. The front-line workers and junior managers soon begin to feel as though they are either 'banging their heads against a wall' or, worse, jeopardizing their careers, and that, for all the good ideas and intentions behind the company's learning strategy, nothing is really going to change. Their experience of individual learning within the company has been good, but they have become cynical about the company's claim to be a learning organization (Vince, 2002: 76-77).

This illustrates just one of the contradictions inherent in learning and highlights the fact that it is grounded within a social context, a context which is part of the dynamic that determines both *what* will be learnt and *how* any learning might be applied. Learning can be disturbing and disrupting for the individual and the social context. It may require us to let go of old learning; it might also place us at odds with what is socially acceptable.

I have been party to a number of conversations where it has been grandly announced that arts organisations undergoing change want to be 'learning organisations'. Every time I hear this said, I feel the cold shiver associated with the saying

about someone walking over your grave. I have reflected on this at length, because in many ways it seems like something that ought to be embraced and celebrated.

I now think what troubles me most is the trusting nature with which this phrase is expressed. I have never heard it challenged: usually people just nod sagely. This is something I take now to mean confusion rather than agreement. No one really knows what it means, but it has a plausible and desirable ring to it.

Grasping mercury

> What concepts, I asked myself, might be deployed by the course members to 'get beneath the surface' of the practices and languages that they were being encouraged to adopt? (Watson, 2001: 392).

The leadership field is characterised by different perspectives. It has been subject to debates around management and leadership, the individual and the social, traits and skills or charisma, the transactional or the transformational. It is evident that, 'leadership is indeed difficult to pin down' (Trehan, 2007). In their study on leadership, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) found that while research participants could talk in an informed way about current perspectives on leadership, they actually held contradictory and vague views, to the point that in action their earlier notions evaporated. In practice, participants described several tactics which represented a disappearing act for the formal rhetoric to which they initially stated they subscribed:

- pointing out the crucial issue but then moving in all directions and being unclear about how to tackle it
- stating the obvious as a uniting vision and then living the vision through improving social relationships
- limiting one's role to presenting ideas and then letting others decide, a kind of minimal influencing

Leadership is contested as a concept...

- stating one leadership principle as crucial and then contradicting it in practice
- doing primarily other things than the leadership argued to be very important
- providing space for others and largely abdicating the influencing process

Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003: 377) concluded from their study that it cannot be taken for granted that leadership is taking place in organisations or projects:

> Our general impression is that it is difficult to say anything of the possible existence of leadership in the great majority of organizations and management situations.

Enacting our leadership out loud and in public

Leadership is a political act. I have always avoided being classified as a 'leader' and in fact I do not regard myself as one. Once again some of my underlying assumptions are laid bare. Do I try and do my job to the best of my ability? Of course. Do I try and influence others in my point of view? Absolutely. I also like to think I have good ideas, take risks, inspire people and offer new insights. For me, however, this is all a part of being an active human being and the leadership construct is neither useful nor relevant.

There is the possibility that this unearths something deeper than merely an individual preference. This may be something that is well embedded in the fact that I have always worked in the not for profit sector and for, or with, what I would term 'mission led' organisations. Much of the sector is driven by a passion and a vision – an ideology based on the role of culture and how people should engage with it.

Exercising power, authority and leadership in this context is a complex issue and heightens the tension between being part of a workgroup and being on the boundary of that group. Often the move into a leadership position involves the

movement away from the ideology that brought someone into the work in the first place. There is also the issue of the wider societal perspective on leadership, which may not be limited to the cultural sector, and there is a sense this has been changing in recent years.

> There is… less consensus about the leader's inalienable right to executive action, including within managers themselves. Instead there appears to be only an inalienable right to dispute authority, without offering alternative leadership (Zagier Roberts, 1994: 191).

Zagier Roberts (1994) suggests that there has been growing anxiety in work, and in society in general, about taking the initiative, about putting yourself in positions of authority and taking actions by which you might be judged. Perhaps this is an alternative reading of the notion of distributed leadership. Far from being a participatory and democratic ideology, it is a defence mechanism by which individuals can avoid the turmoil of exercising individual power and authority.

I have certainly worked with a number of senior arts managers and freelancers who appear to have an ambivalent or uncomfortable relationship with their 'leadership' role. The impacts of this are varied, but seem to manifest themselves most often in a lack of confidence and increased challenge from their team or co-workers.

Conclusion

> If leadership can be reduced to uniform definitions and formulaic presentations such as those about successful styles, then it is reasonable to suppose that it can be transmitted through culturally accepted processes to each successive generation of leaders in similarly reliable and valid ways. But if there are many definitions of leadership and if each organisation or social context has a unique character, then exploring the variations may be more important for… developers to encourage than the one right way approach (Trehan, 2007: 76).

I have attempted to argue that leadership is contested as a concept and we should be mindful of development initiatives, workshops, training or anything else that suggests otherwise. Leadership is a human construct and we should not forget that. Its benefits and challenges are part of a discourse we have created for ourselves and should be recognised as such. We cannot, and should not, accept a discourse that places leadership as a common sense given to which we must all strive. As I have illustrated, it is much harder than we might think to pin down.

> … people who achieve greatness are as defective as anyone else and what the rich and famous told you made them successful… was wrong. They glossed over the reality and painted it how you wanted to hear it (Hogan, 2009: 23).

We also need to be mindful of the impact on those people who do not get selected for leadership 'fast tracks', development intensives or other initiatives which arguably undermine the justice and equality inherent in a more critical approach. As a practitioner who works with individuals, groups and organisations on a regular basis, this reflection on my own taken-for-granteds and underlying assumptions has led me to be more thoughtful about the models I use.

I think we should be exploring competing frameworks, to ask what their origins are and how they might be challenged. We need, as a sector, to have the courage to really explore our own practices (some of which, in my experience, are not pretty). We need to pay more attention to context and to be more challenging of the supposed 'role models' who are offered as 'leaders' (not necessarily of them as individuals but of those who propose them).

This may or may not have been a useful exploration. It has led me to challenge the status of learning, to suggest that leadership may be little more than a construction and to highlight that the mission-led nature of the sector creates additional tensions for leadership. I offer these alternatives to some of the usual messages around leadership

development in order to explore the possibilities of a more critical approach to the field by:

> … challenging assumptions of ordinary perceiving, conceiving, and acting; recognizing influences on beliefs and actions; exploring alternatives that disrupt routines; and being appropriately sceptical about truth claims (Trehan, 2007: 75-76).

This sets the scene for the opening up of questions and further debate:

- how is the idea of leadership development being used within the sector?
- what are the tacit assumptions about personal growth and the associated investment?
- indeed, who is investing?
- whose interests are being served?
- are there any potentially undesirable outcomes or impacts for stakeholders/participants?
- what happens when someone questions the approaches being taken?

I would argue that in the light of the multiple definitions of and approaches to leadership, it is crucial to a robust development process to adopt a critical stance; to examine underlying power relations and assumptions; to unpack the multiple discourses; to look to justice and equality; and not to neglect the emotional and social context.

I finish by offering some personal thoughts and observations on responding to the critical question of leadership development. I encourage you to read them with a critical eye: what might they say about my beliefs, my frames of reference and my hypotheses?

A Critical Question

Learn many languages it will serve you well
But remember which one is your own

Remember the middles and ask what they think
They see things you will miss

Enjoy the power of metaphor
Recognise the web of stories

Attend the Art of Management conference
at least once
Make everyone read *Who Moved My Cheese?*
Learn to love confusion
it gives you wondrous gifts

Turn the stones
And look underneath

Be a critical learner and
Hold your nerve for what emerges

Know when it is time to cut up your suit
and learn how to remake it

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11 Doing the right thing: the ethics of cultural leadership

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Jigisha Patel has worked in the arts and heritage sector for the past 12 years and is a 2006–7 Clore Fellow. Jigisha has specialist knowledge in the field of arts marketing, audience development and research, particularly with engaging non-specialist audiences.

This article explores the decisions and challenges that cultural leaders face day-to-day in order to better understand the role that ethics play in the leadership of the sector. Ten highly regarded figures from key national cultural institutions confidentially shared their experiences with me. Conversations covered themes of legitimacy, risk, obligation and customs. By introducing two central concepts of contemporary ethical theory, deontology and consequentialism, I consider the extent to which the leader's own value framework and ethical stances influence their professional practice, with a focus on consultative leadership. The findings on this particular theme point to a convergence on ethical concerns.

Questionable bankers, political favours and medical advances – debates around professional ethics are rarely out of the headlines. Within the cultural sector too, ethical issues such as restitution and human remains in the museum field, or censorship and copyright in the wider arts field, are widely discussed and debated. Indeed, the range of leadership programmes currently addressing diversity, skills gap and gender imbalance themselves demonstrate a concern for ethics within the cultural sector.

But ethics within the practice of cultural leadership has remained largely unexplored, untouched by the debates around ethics that have influenced and shaped the worlds of business, law or medicine for example. As one highly-regarded leader of a major cultural institution said, 'In over 30 years of working in this sector, no one has ever asked me about ethics and leadership.' Yet cultural leaders as individuals are at the core of determining the vision, articulation and programme of their organisations. Their personal value and ethical framework, consciously or unconsciously, plays a significant role in the management, behaviour and output of their cultural organisation.

How much do we consider ethics in our leadership practice?

How much time do we give ourselves to consider difficult situations? Do we assess our outcomes and reflect on our decisions? What are we willing to sacrifice and live with in order to meet our objectives? Or is it that given the extreme pressures of time, workloads and resources, we are too busy to be so contemplative and consultative? Are we in most cases simply limited by our options? As one cultural leader put it, 'Often it's not a choice between good and bad but a choice between bad and slightly less bad, where nothing is particularly clear-cut and you have to try and differentiate between shades of grey.'

Having worked in a number of institutions under highly charismatic directors, I have always been fascinated by the extent to which their personal ethical and value framework moulds and shapes that of the entire organisation. As a Fellow on the Clore Leadership Programme, I had the opportunity to meet some remarkable cultural leaders who have undertaken major turnarounds and delivered highly complex projects. It was clear that success in these instances always came at a price. While they generously shared the highs and lows of their experiences, I wanted to know how they faced those ethical challenges, made the tough decisions and dealt with the consequences.

I set about exploring how cultural leaders experience ethical dilemmas, and whether they see them as such. I was fascinated to uncover what role ethics play in their day-to-day and longer-term thinking. Ten leading figures from flagship national institutions, each highly respected and known for their vision and integrity, privately shared with me the tensions they face, and how their public and private ethical and value frameworks shape the demands, assumptions and pressures of their work.

In order to draw any meaningful analysis or conclusions from these conversations, it is necessary to turn to the study of contemporary ethical theory itself and the application of two of its central concepts – consequentialism and deontology.

Consequentialists or deontologists? Introducing the ethical theory

Consequentialism is the theory that holds that the 'good' takes precedence over the 'right'. Deontology is the belief that the 'right' is a more fundamental moral concept than the 'good'. These theories help us to understand how leaders are guided and assess choices about what they ought to do, or think it is acceptable to do, and in which circumstances.

Briefly and perhaps too simplistically, the central idea of consequentialism is that what makes an action morally right is that its consequences are better than any of its alternatives. These consequences are the basis of any valid moral judgement about the action. For consequentialists, the process and the action itself are of less importance as long as the outcome is good.

In deontology, the moral value of an action is completely independent from the consequences of the action. Deontology focuses on the rightness or wrongness of the action itself. Deontologists therefore believe that some actions are intrinsically wrong and should not be undertaken, even in the pursuit of the most exceptional consequences.

Both of these ethical theories are concerned with action and determining the best, right or good action in any given situation. Individuals are

deontologists about those issues that matter to them and they in some sense believe in, so nothing will make them compromise this value or principle no matter what it would get them. Individuals are consequentialists when they believe in a certain end so much they will do anything to achieve it.

Deontological and consequentialist theories are useful as they provide a framework for exploring motivations, how decisions are made, issues prioritised, and more broadly, how individuals consider and manage the responsibilities of their roles. Understanding how people think about different values, aims and objectives, and what particular approach they adopt, or think it is acceptable to adopt, and in which circumstances, enables us to understand how ethics influence leadership practice.

It is natural to see deontological and consequentialist orientations as mutually exclusive. A leader either pays attention to the moral correctness of an action or to the anticipated outcomes. However, what makes an action right or wrong is not always definable without considering its consequences in some form or another. Individuals with deontological orientations rarely disregard consequences entirely. Even a deontologist may take into account outcomes if two morally equal acts have different consequences. As one leader put it, 'Tensions exist on an almost daily basis.'

It is important to say that different ethical approaches may be taken by the same leader in relation to a particular time, situation or set of decisions. For other leaders, an ethical approach may be entirely non-negotiable and they will work and behave in a consistent way. As this leader explained, 'You have to be clear about where you're going and then, without trampling over everything, including your own ethical system, working out how best to do it.'

Overall however, as the cultural leaders demonstrated, determining the best action to follow is never an easy task.

The thicket of ethics in cultural leadership practice

Cultural leaders face competing tasks and decisions on a daily basis, which require them to exercise their ethical judgement. During our discussions, some themes emerged which demonstrated commonalities around considerations of ethics and the way in which they operate in the sector more widely. The prevailing themes were risk-taking, making judgements, loyalty, customs, politics and money. Each of these had at times presented complex ethical dilemmas and caused great personal tension which had clearly left a mark on the individuals – some speaking about experiences which had taken place over 20 years ago as though it were yesterday.

For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to focus on one thread which ran through all of the discussions – that of consultative leadership. The individuals spoke about how they have been supported or otherwise by their teams and peers, and when they as head of the organisation, ultimately have to make tough choices on their own.

So, to what extent do cultural leaders seek to involve their management teams in the actual processes of leadership and decision making? Cultural leaders lead from the front and set a dynamic vision for others to follow. As one leader described, 'I've always wanted to set some form of example to the people I work with in the way that you model behaviour, you model an ethical stance, you model values for an organisation.' I was curious to find out if the opinions of others really count or is it ultimately the individual's ethical stance that takes precedence?

Consult or go it alone?

Overall, the leaders reflected a common appreciation that consultation and actively involving staff was a positive and valued part of their role. It was equally recognised that consultation was needed for legitimacy and authority, encapsulated

by one leader who said, 'I think a good director will seek permission rather than necessarily have to pull rank.' Another said, 'Certainly freedoms of expression and view I would put incredibly high within my ethical view point – a respect for someone else's point of view and a hope that they respect yours.'

For one leader, the importance of consultation and support from the team was clear-cut:

I have learned that my inner team are absolutely crucial. If your chums aren't confident, trusting, happy, stimulated, if it isn't sparkling and fun, (and privately we can quarrel but we can come out and be a unified team because we share the values, we share the vision) then it is miserable really.

These views suggest a deontological approach to participatory leadership, where leaders have a moral commitment to involving their staff and a firmly held principle that it is valuable in itself to seek the opinion and input of their colleagues. As explained by one leader:

Clearly I'm heavily influenced by others because I think lots of people are smarter than me and I tend to probably want to have a group of smarter people around me – as smart as they can be. I've worked in situations where if you don't have that challenge then I think that you're probably not going to do a very good job.

While consultative leadership is important, one leader explained that at times there are other values at play that have a greater importance or significance. Consultative leadership may not necessarily always be the most valuable in a whole set of intrinsic values. As one leader explained:

Often there can be judgements where you, as someone who is managing the process or people, or the activity, are in a much better position to judge. So if someone says to you, 'I think what you're doing in this area is not right,' you have to be self-aware enough to be able to question whether they are right but then, fundamentally, you

Cultural leaders face competing tasks and decisions on a daily basis, which require them to exercise ethical judgement

then have to get yourself into a position where you can say, 'Well I think you're wrong and I'm right.'

Through the discussions, it became clear that even a leader with a deontological attitude towards participatory leadership may in fact move to a more consequentialist approach if they believe that higher principles are at stake in a given situation or when another firmly held belief takes precedence. One leader described this reasoning:

I guess there comes a point where I suppose I don't deny the fact that if I think something is right, or I think that it is imperative that we do something in a certain way, that as much as other people might disagree, sometimes you have to actually make those decisions and say that's the way it's going to be. But I think that's probably part of the attraction of leadership.

Do the voices of others actually influence the decisions that are made or is it simply a mechanism that the leaders use to increase their legitimacy and power? If this is the case, it too points to a more consequentialist approach to leadership whereby the leaders are more concerned about the resulting impact on their standing and position, simply using consultative and cooperative methods because they are effective in reaching their end goals. As one leader said, 'You will persuade, cajole, traduce or do any of the things you need to get there.'

The tension felt operating in a manner that is both consultative and, at the same time, uses the benefit of their own experience and knowledge, was evident amongst all of the leaders. As one put it:

As a leader, you have to stand up and do what you believe in without being domineering. It's quite a delicate balance between having a vision and being sensitive to others in the way that it's carried out. You have to consider how you bring people with you and enrich that vision by drawing other perspectives into it.

All of the leaders also shared occasions when they have felt isolated and experienced the stark reality of what it means to be a leader, where they have been forced to use their own best judgement to make difficult choices. As one said painfully: 'There are many moments when all help deserts you.' The responsibility played heavily on their minds, as described by one leader:

I think the difficulty if you're looking at it from the perspective of someone running organisations, often the hardest decisions are the ones you have to make yourself.

Conclusions

The leaders demonstrated a strong deontological stance with regards to consultative leadership in the cultural sector. Consultation and participation by senior colleagues is intrinsically valuable to the leaders and cannot be compromised in pursuit of specific goals. There are, however, instances where a consequentialist approach is taken and consultative leadership is overridden, but this is generally only when higher values are at stake or where a more strongly held ethical belief is in play.

This convergence on ethical stance regarding consultative leadership is fascinating, given that in my wider research on ethics in cultural leadership practice the individuals endorsed very different and often contradictory ethical approaches. It demonstrates the importance of collaboration, mutual respect and expertise that seem to underpin our sector.

It is interesting too that the approaches and positions on consultative leadership tended to be drawn from a personal ethical stance. In other professions such as the medical or legal sectors, it would be considered inappropriate for an individual to be applying their personal ethical viewpoint in a professional situation. There would be a clear public/private divide that does not appear to exist in the cultural sector. This may be due, in part, to the fact that there is no given code of ethics for leadership of the cultural sector. Speaking to the

leaders in this project, nor would one be wholly desirable. However, there would appear to be implicit and/or emerging expectations, standards or rules.

I recall early on in my career in the cultural sector, feeling very excluded from the decision making process and consultation which took place behind closed doors and after-hours. I remember how disheartening and demotivating this felt, particularly as I was full of enthusiasm and ideas. Now, having worked as part of senior management teams and with a strong deontological view on participative leadership, I know first-hand the challenges and pressures of trying to canvas opinion and create an inclusive decision making process.

The challenge for the sector and for aspiring cultural leaders is perhaps how to ensure that we continue to invest in consultative and participative leadership, drawing on and valuing the expertise, experience and energy of those around us – at all levels. And for us all to be conscious of how we as leaders apply ethics within our working practice and the impact of this on our organisations more broadly.

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12 Working with uncertainty

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Chrissie Godfrey graduated in Theatre and has worked in the arts and cultural sector since 1986, in all the usual jobs including venue management and as an arts officer and lecturer. For the last ten years, she has worked as consultant, facilitator and coach, and has recently completed an MSc in Change Agency.

This paper highlights the increasingly complex nature of the world in which we live and work. It suggests that in the arts, we unwittingly collude with the 'myth of control', while at the same time being at relative ease with the domain of uncertainty. The paper calls for arts leaders to own up to the capacity to work creatively with 'not knowing' and develop it as the strength it is. Drawing on writers whose discussions of 'change' are informed by complexity theory, I highlight five core skills and approaches to help leaders better embrace the reality of 'not knowing' and to develop their own sense of authenticity and self in complex times.

Introduction: our uncertain world

In the early years of the 21st century, we find ourselves living with an extraordinary level of uncertainty, complexity and flux. Yet at the same time, we are running our organisations in the same way we have done for years. Maybe we think, 'It ain't broke, so don't fix it', or that sticking with the known way of doing things is a necessary anchor in times of change. On the other hand, maybe we are in the throes of a shift between old and new ways of managing and leading, but don't quite have the language to pin down what is happening. My sense is that when we are able to take real, honest stock of our organisational health and wellbeing, we can see the increased levels of complexity we are dealing with, and see only too well the stress and anxiety that these can cause.

> The world we have created has outstripped our capacity to understand it. The scale of interconnectivity and interdependence has resulted in a step change in the complexity of the operating environment (Leicester and O'Hara, 2009).

I believe the world is calling for different leadership approaches – and not just ones that tinker at the edges. However, when the times call for the radically different, our tendency under such pressure is to come up with small variations on what we have done in the past, because to do anything else is to let go of control.

> Our dominant frame of reference tells us… that if we are to have any order, we had better work out a blueprint for it in advance and put the order there; otherwise we will fall into disorder and anarchy… But the foresight and control we exercise aren't consistent with the reality of our experiences, and recipes never seem to work (Stacey, 1996).

In our traditional way of working, we plan, plan and plan again, despite all evidence to show that plans simply don't work out the way we thought they would. However much we might pretend otherwise, 'A' simply won't lead to 'Z', or indeed sometimes even to 'B'. But what alternatives do we have?

Meeting complexity

It was a Wednesday afternoon in October 2003 when I first met the delights of complexity theory. I had moved from doing 'proper' arts jobs into consultancy and found myself increasingly involved in helping people think about how to manage change in this complex world. Feeling in need of some theoretical, as well as practical skill and knowledge, development, I embarked on a Masters degree with a group of fellow learners drawn from a range of industrial and organisational backgrounds. I was the only arts person there.

The key words… are 'courage' and 'not knowing'

Complexity theory is really a basket of ideas and ways of looking at our world inspired by quantum science. I don't pretend to understand the science bit of it, but that doesn't really matter. More important is the way complexity theory can offer us rich metaphors for making a new kind of sense of our life and work. On that Wednesday afternoon, I began a journey that has influenced my life, my approach to working with groups and organisations, and changed my perspective on arts managers' and practitioners' capacity to work creatively with uncertainty.

The edge of chaos

Ralph Stacey, who writes about complexity and creativity in organisations, maps out the shifting dynamics at play on a continuum from lots of certainty (about the world) and lots of agreement (about what to do next), to none at all. Too much of any and you have organisational stagnation, too little and you have meltdown. However, somewhere in the middle – with just enough uncertainty to keep you alert, and just enough disagreement to keep an edge on things – you have the 'zone of complexity', commonly referred to as the 'edge of chaos'. For Stacey, this is a place of mess, muddle, risk taking and experimentation, but one that generates new patterns, innovative ideas and creative perspectives. He calls it a place of 'bounded instability', and the true home of emergent change (Zimmerman 2001).

Three things struck me as I heard about this bit of theory. First, the idea of 'bounded instability' – the mix of people and place that allows for risk, muddle, emerging patterns and creative ideas – sounded remarkably like a rehearsal room or similar creative space. Second, I was pretty comfortable about being in that messy, muddled place myself. Third, my peer learners, without exception, were horrified at the very idea of wanting to inhabit this domain. For them, it was far too uncomfortable and unpredictable – to be avoided at all costs! For me, though, it was a fantastic affirmation. Arts organisations are so often accused of being

'un-business-like'; they work hard to exude predictability and control, to keep the metaphorical 'creative mess' of the rehearsal room out of sight. My sense, on that Wednesday afternoon, was that we were missing a trick here.

The illusion of control

The problem is that we all collude in pretending we are in control. Yet writers inspired by complexity theory urge us to give up on the 'myth of control', to deal with the anxiety of 'not knowing' and instead 'relish diversity, welcome surprises, look for the ineffable and appreciate the richness and the unique quality of all things' (Leicester and O'Hara, 2009).

We find this difficult, not least because of our cultural paradigms about control.

> We refuse to accept ambiguity and surprise as part of life because we hold onto the myth that prediction and control are possible … we still believe that what holds a system together is our leadership (Wheatley, 1999).

This is confusing! Surely leadership is all about providing the prediction and control – the safety, if you like – that helps us move forward. And yet, wouldn't it be refreshing if we were more able to change how we think, act, feel about the reality of uncertainty in our leadership practices and indeed in our whole lives.

> Managers are 'in control' and 'not in control' at the same time. In this paradoxical process, the key management attribute is the courage to carry on participating creatively in the conversation in which new meaning emerges, in spite of not knowing (Streatfield, 2001).

The key words for me here are 'courage' and 'not knowing'. I believe this complex age calls for honesty with ourselves and courage with the world to say, 'Hey, I just don't know, and what's more, that's OK, because pretty exciting things happen

when we say "I don't know"'. In the arts, we constantly work with the reality of that experience, and not just in the rehearsal room. We just have to stop pretending otherwise, that's all.

The rehearsal room and the brochure

Whilst immersing myself in complexity theory, I was also working as a consultant with the creative team at the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre in Taunton. Having lost their Arts Council core funding through risk averse programming, the theatre had just got some money, and a new Artistic Director, to help start to 'turn the tanker' back around. The strategy, called 'Hothouse', was a radical one. We decided to invite three artists to work for a year with the organisation as creative provocateurs: to explore their own practice, but also to challenge organisational blind spots to stimulate change. In planning this, we got very excited about the need to hold open space for challenge to be possible, both in terms of mindsets, but also physical space. This included wanting to leave exhibition areas unprogrammed for the high profile Somerset Art Weeks some 10 months hence, so that the artists could do what they wanted with them.

This threw up the question: what on earth do we put in the Art Weeks brochure? We hadn't even appointed the artists yet but the copy deadline loomed. The tension was quite extraordinary – at a time when the 'turning tanker' was intended to increase stakeholders' confidence, here we were saying we 'didn't know' what was going to happen! The 'edge of chaos' was put into the limelight as we worried about what this 'not knowing' was going to look like to stakeholders and the public. Our anxieties soared – until we were able to name what was going on for us. It might seem a small illustration, but at the time it took huge courage to turn 'I don't know' into a positive thing, and ultimately into brochure language of some kind or another without compromising the ethos of what we were trying to achieve.

Five thoughts

In learning to embrace, rather than disguise, the reality of not knowing, the metaphors of quantum science are rich ground for inspiration. I would like to offer you five simple thoughts, influenced by complexity theory, which have emerged as key guidelines for me and my work as I seek to support people in working with uncertainty.

Pay attention to relationships

> The fundamental insight of twentieth century physics has yet to penetrate the social world: relationships are more fundamental than things (Senge at al., 2005).

In quantum science, it is the relationship between the 'matter' of fermions and the 'glue' of bosons that make a table a table. It is the relationship between the wave packet's 'tendency to behave as though it were smeared out all over space and time' (Zoha, 1990) interacting with the energy of the 'observer' that 'collapses it down' into what we collectively perceive as our observable world. Pretty weird stuff at that level, but the message is clear:

> We live in a universe where relationships are primary… nothing exists independent of its relationships... This is a world of process, the process of connecting, where 'things' come into temporary existence because of relationship (Wheatley, 1999).

In organisations we can so easily lose sight of the centrality of relationships in the welter of tasks. I think that if we can pay attention to relationships and to our own authenticity within them, we stand a chance of overcoming the historic paradigm of 'organisation as machine', or the influence of our scientific minds that frame the world as 'me' and 'it' rather than, quite simply, 'us'. From that kind of authenticity, where life isn't so much about proving we are right as discovering what we have learned, embracing uncertainty becomes much more interesting.

Learn to have conversations

Human conversations are deeply creative acts, but let us not be beguiled into thinking we are always good at them. Having a conversation is a real skill, and one that we can develop. 'Dialogue is about emergence: the bringing forth of new and previously hidden meanings and understandings' (Battram, 1996). If we are to fully embrace the big 'I don't know', then the need to surface new meaning together rather than tinker with the old, seems pretty crucial to me. In quantum terms, conversations help us explore the wave packet of 'possibility space', 'the place where all our ideas live before they are brought into being' (Ibid). The delight of conversation is that we can explore possibilities, and shape, define, hold open and 'collapse them down' as we go.

> Our habits of thought and speech tend to blind us to the sheer flowing ubiquity of the communicative dance in which we are all engaged. Instead we focus mainly on the tangible products of conversation – the organisational designs, performance profiles, business models, strategic frameworks, action plans, lists and categories with which we seek to grasp the reified complexities of organisational life and render them 'manageable' (Shaw, 2002).

All it takes is a subtle shift away from conversation as a way of lining up what we need to do next, to seeing that conversation *is* part of the doing, and the being as well. It makes the 'communicative dance' a thing of elegance and delight – or, depending on your mood, full blooded rock-and-roll!

Ask more questions

I am pretty passionate about using this big 'I don't know' as a good reason to get people asking more questions.

> Learning based on the past suffices when the past is a good guide to the future. But it leaves us blind to profound shifts when whole new forces shaping change arise (Senge et al., 2005).

Questions are part of the 'communicative dance', but it is interesting to see what happens when we allow them to take more of a lead in the way we think at an organisational level. With Simon Jutton at Arts Council England, South West, I have been involved in using action research approaches (e.g. Reason and Bradbury, 2007) in organisational development, and exploring new ways of thinking about and writing business plans and funding bids.

The premise lies in finding one or more questions that are really important for an organisation to explore, devising a series of practical activities, interventions or projects that will help them explore those questions, and building in significant spaces for reflecting on the experiences to draw out the learning en route and so inform the future. What the process doesn't do is define a goal and set out to achieve it through known means (because there are too many 'I don't knows' around to do that). What it does do is give organisations permission to bring the mindset of the rehearsal room into the full organisational domain, to pilot new approaches, to adjust direction and to take time out to think about what is happening.

'Hothouse' at the Brewhouse was one such project. A far more ambitious Arts Council 'Thrive' organisational development funded project also used action research to explore and establish a complex partnership between sixteen very diverse arts organisations across Somerset. Firebird Theatre, a company of disabled actors based in Bristol, has also used action research as a basis for their Grants for the Arts developmental bids and subsequent working and learning together.

In this (complex) domain we can understand why things happen only in retrospect … That is why, instead of attempting to impose a course of action, leaders must patiently allow the path forward to reveal itself. They need to probe first, then sense, and then respond (Snowdon and Boon, 2007).

Action research isn't always easy to do. It is a learned approach in its own right, but in my experience has opened up possibilities for seeing things differently that are maybe timely if a new leadership paradigm in our sector is to emerge.

Pay attention to beginnings

Sensitivity to 'initial conditions' in complexity science is about how radically different emergent behaviours arise from minutely divergent beginnings. The popular example is that of the effect of the butterfly's wing on the weather on the other side of the globe. The related quantum notion of fractals (patterns which combine to create larger versions of that same pattern) also says something about the power of that first emergent pattern.

For me, this raises questions about our own ongoing efforts to initiate things as leaders. If, at the quantum level, so much rests on tiny variations at the start of things, to what do we need to pay attention at moments of our own 'beginnings'? Back to 'Hothouse' again, we realised we wanted the artists' selection process to be a fractal of what we hoped the 'Hothouse' experience as a whole would contain. The result was a great day involving 16 artists using every nook and cranny of the building (public and not so public) to make instant collaborative pieces of work that would help us see the fabric of the place anew. At the end, everyone wanted to come back and do it again!

However, for me, 'beginnings' are as much to do with being as doing, and I believe that paying attention to our 'inner state' is paramount as we embark on something new. We need to be mindful of what we are embodying as we begin. To cultivate inner state calls for inner work and tangible practices to raise self awareness and increase our capacity for making conscious – rather than unconscious and reactive – choices. My own coaching work with emerging and established leaders is absolutely about this domain of personal development work.

Get out of your own way

Sometimes our knowledge is our worst ally, not least because of the kinds of knowledge that are valued in Western culture: rational, logical, linear and fact-based. It can constrain us rather than enlighten us. Peter Senge and his colleagues explore in their beautiful book *Presence* (2005) what, at a leadership level, is meant by deeper ways of knowing.

> In effect, 'presencing' constitutes a third type of seeing, beyond seeing external reality and beyond even seeing from within the living whole. It is seeing from within the source from which the future whole is emerging, peering back at the present from the future (Senge et al., 2005).

For these authors, the key to 'presencing' lies in experiencing the deep sense of interconnectivity that quantum physics says is the basis of our reality, and then acting from that place of connection. To do this requires the capacity to 'let go' of our assumptions and world views in order to 'let come' wisdom that we would not otherwise locate.

> You observe and observe and let this experience well up into something appropriate. In a sense, there's no decision making. What to do just becomes obvious. You can't rush it. Much of it depends on where you're coming from and who you are as a person. All you can do is position yourself according to your unfolding vision of what is coming. A totally different set of rules applies. You need to 'feel out' what to do (Senge et al., 2005).

All the more important, then, to develop our capacity for reflective, even meditative practice, to find our own quiet spaces as part of working with the uncertainty of creative muddle and mess.

Conclusion

On that Wednesday afternoon, I felt that a certain domain of my skills and experiences that seemed particular to working in the arts had been affirmed. My ongoing love affair with complexity and where it has taken me continues to strengthen my belief that working emergently, sensitively and creatively in authentic relationship with each other is the only show in town, and one that I believe our sector is in a position to embrace and model.

> We are pushing at the limits of traditional organisation… The new organisational structure is a pattern of relationships that is able to maintain its integrity over time. It has the discipline to perform the ordinary as well as the extraordinary tasks, can support a sense of moral purpose beyond its own survival, is open and inclusive, nurtures and supports its members in a challenging environment. The discovery of this form (and it will be discovered not invented) will be a critical advance for all sectors – and our work suggests we are likely to find it first in the arts (Leicester and O'Hara, 2009).

Let's see, shall we?

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I believe the world is calling for different leadership approaches – and not just ones that tinker at the edges

13 Trends in leadership writing and research: a short review of the leadership literature

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This paper begins with an introduction to viewing the 'map' of leadership theory and frameworks through the different contextual lenses of academic, practitioner and learner. It affirms the complementary importance of theory and practice and the ability of everyone to be a learner in terms of leadership development. The paper then provides a short review of generic leadership literature, highlighting the more significant trends in leadership research and writing. It concludes with a challenge to the cultural and creative sector to reflect on practice and develop its own theoretical frameworks.

Introduction

The first part of this paper is written from the perspective of someone who has been a practitioner in the cultural sector for many years, and who is now working in the academic world directing a cultural leadership programme: hence my interest in how practice and theory complement each other. Kerry and I hope that our short literature review that follows will provide a useful way into key leadership theories and texts and encourage more learning about, as well as through, leadership.

Susanne Burns

The leadership map and lenses

Leadership development is not unique to the cultural and creative industries. Recognition that there is a critical relationship between leadership development, strategic orientation and organisational performance has led to a plethora of leadership development interventions across sectors and within the cultural and creative sector, we have seen a new approach to leadership development within the early years of this century.

This new attitude has created a hunger for resources and a theoretical underpinning to learning and development. Research within the field is growing as more academics show increasing interest, and practice based research is becoming more robust. However, the literature that supports leadership development programmes remains largely generic. As Sue Hoyle, Director of the Clore Leadership Programme stated:

There have been many books published about leadership – tap 'leadership' into Amazon's search engine and up comes a list of over a quarter of a million titles. Add 'arts' to 'leadership' and the number drops to under 8,000, of which almost all are about the 'art' of leadership. So there is probably a real need for a book dealing authoritatively with the subject of leadership in the arts, and providing lessons from the arts to leaders in other fields such as business, public and third sectors (Hoyle, 2008).

Hoyle highlights that although we have much to offer other sectors, the dearth of available literature appears to force us to contextualise what we do within more generic frameworks.

The literature emerging from the cultural and creative industries is largely practice based, consisting of reports and articles published by lead agencies, including the Cultural Leadership Programme, within industry journals and through 'think tanks', such as Mission Models Money[1], now

1 www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk/

called Designing for Transition (DEFT). This useful and evolving literature is largely **practice based**, which raises some interesting issues for the development of this field of study.

In the opening pages of *Simulations*, Baudrillard (1983) uses the metaphor of map and territory to argue that, within contemporary society, the simulated copy had superseded the original object and the map had come to precede the geographic territory. This long standing metaphor has pertinence for any discussion of cultural leadership. The 'map' of leadership theory and frameworks does not precede the practice of leadership. Instead, the territory or practice precedes the map, and theory should be both a reflection of, as well as a guide for, what is happening on the ground.

The leadership map can be viewed through different lenses: the practitioner, the academic and the learner. In the same way as we change lenses for reading, driving or sewing, an individual may look at knowledge in different ways depending on context. The challenge is to integrate this vision to make connections between the different approaches and, through reflection, to make sense of the whole.

The **practitioner** gathers a body of knowledge through experience and practice. Their research is applied and often not shared or communicated to others. It may be structured research (audience surveys, box office data analysis, programme evaluation) but it serves a purpose internal to the organisation and is utilised in a business specific context. Action learning and reflective practice occur in unstructured as well as structured ways. This knowledge is not often validated and the practitioner will not always have confidence in its relevance to others.

The **academic** develops a body of knowledge through empirical research. This research leads to theoretical frameworks which are published and disseminated through academic channels. The research may have limited relevance to the real problems being faced on the ground and, even when it is of relevance, both the discourse from which it has emerged and the contexts through which it is disseminated may mean that it is not

immediately accessible to the practitioner. And yet, it is this knowledge that is deemed to be valid within academic research systems and procedures.

The **learner** develops a body of knowledge through the integration of the two – a kind of varifocal lens. Learners on structured programmes of study will be encouraged to link the two processes and, through applied learning and reflective practice, develop a more holistic approach to theory and practice – the map and the territory.

These definitions are not mutually exclusive in terms of individual experience. Academics can be practitioners and practitioners can teach in academia – this is quite prevalent in our sector – and in informal, if not always formal ways, we are all learners as we seek to develop our work.

Theory does not replace practice or supersede it in validity, but complements it. In learning and development then, the body of knowledge gathered through practice is as important as the body of knowledge gathered through theory. The most powerful learning occurs where knowledge of both the map and the actual territory can be cross referenced and tested for validity through reflection, where the map can inform our understanding of the territory and vice versa.

The challenge for leadership development provision is to move the relationships between the lenses to ensure that, whether it is sector or academia led, it balances the need for theory and practice. This paper helps the practitioner towards a varifocal lense in providing a background to leadership literature developed through academic research and supporting an enhanced understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. In this context, our purpose is not to explore what has been written about *cultural* leadership, but rather to introduce cultural sector practitioners to the concept of leadership and its development as presented in the generic, interdisciplinary literature.

In *Meeting the Challenge: Leadership Development in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, Devlin et al. argue that 'leadership development in the creative and cultural industries should be put in the context of its prioritisation across many other

sectors – in the UK and elsewhere' (2008: 17). There is much to be learned from a cross sector approach.

Reviewing the literature

The quest to understand leadership across various sectors and disciplines has meant that the body of existing literature is vast. After decades of research, a generally accepted, comprehensive theory of leadership appears to elude us. The issues are complex and, as Bennis and Nanus (1997) state, '…leadership is the most studied and least understood concept of any in the social sciences'.

The paper therefore does not present definitive propositions or conclusions on leadership, but introduces the reader to various ideas on its theory and practice. Leading is a fundamental human activity so, predictably, there are many researchers and writers who have developed their own interests and areas of expertise within the field. The purpose of this short review of the literature is to guide the reader through the more significant trends in leadership research and writing, tracking the evolution of the discipline and providing a framework for understanding and contextualising our own leadership development. The review is by no means exhaustive, and uses only *selected* popular management and scholarly texts.

The dominant identified trends in the literature are as follows:

- distinguishing leadership from management: managing to *lead*
- trait theories and behaviours: focusing upon *leaders*
- conceptual models: constructing and defining *leadership*
- practicing leadership: considering the act of *leading*

It is important to note that trends in leadership writing and research have not necessarily occurred chronologically or been surpassed by another at any point in time in terms of their significance, the

attention paid to them, and their relative credibility. Rather, different theories and perspectives on the study of leadership occur in synthesis, illustrating the range and implied value of critical approaches in the field.

Distinguishing leadership from management: managing to lead

Locke (1991) describes leadership as '…the process of inducing others to take action towards a common goal'.

Leadership is therefore relational. It involves followers and the process is one where the leader does something that induces others to act. In this way, leadership has emerged as a practice distinct from (although not necessarily mutually exclusive to) management. A now famous article by Abraham Zaleznik published in 1977 observed that the difference between managers and leaders lies in their conceptions of and response to 'chaos and order': managers, it is argued, embrace process, seek stability and control, and instinctively try to resolve problems quickly; whereas leaders tolerate chaos and lack of structure and are willing to delay problem-solving in order to understand the issues more fully.

Locke (1991) suggests that the leader establishes vision and strategy, while the manager implements the vision and controls the means to reaching the goals set by the leader. Kotter (1990) observes that management is about coping with complexity and leadership about coping with change, again by 'creating a vision' whereas managers will 'develop a plan'. The inference that effective leaders must be able to influence and guide using vision and direction suggests that they posses more sophisticated personality characteristics. Adair (2003), for example, discusses leadership as an art form, as compared to the science of management, whereby leadership is associated with personality and vision, management with structure, routine and methods. Personal attributes associated with leadership, such as creativity, are the 'added value' that leadership brings to management (Adair,

The 'map' of leadership theory and frameworks does not precede the practice of leadership. Instead, the territory or practice precedes the map, and theory should be a reflection of as well as a guide for what is happening on the ground

2005: 62).

Thomas (2004) describes five distinctive leadership nuances supposedly 'not found in management', including the ability to:

• give direction
• provide inspiration
• build teams
• set an example
• be accepted

While the ability to give direction and build teams are arguably also management skills and responsibilities; providing an example of the symbiotic relationship between the practices of management and leadership, the remaining three nuances described by Thomas again relate to an individual's personality and their interpersonal relationships with others. Leigh and Maynard (2003) define two types of leadership: 'enabling' and 'inspirational'. The former is considered to be more of a management trait, and is associated with operational roles at junior and middle management level. Enabling leaders are thus described as supporters, facilitators and motivators. Alternatively, inspirational leaders adopt behaviours that are less prescribed, such as likeability, integrity and initiative. This substantiates the emerging theory that the 'charisma' of individuals is therefore vital to their success as leaders.

Brown (2000) upholds the charisma theory by presenting six dynamics of leadership that explicitly characterise leaders and their behaviours, personalities, actions and performance, each implying a certain level of judgment on each. These include definitions of leader as:

• hero
• actor
• immortalist
• power broker
• ambassador
• victim

Cartwright (2002: 116) describes several incremental differences between managers and leaders, including suggestions that the leader *innovates* where the manager administers; the leader *originates* where the manager copies others; and the leader *challenges* where the manager accepts convention. The leader therefore, in this example, adopts higher levels of creativity and risk taking. Sloane (2007) advocates innovation as the main distinction between managers and leaders, stressing that successful and competitive organisations are led by people who demonstrate and encourage a culture of creativity, enterprise, and risk taking.

Trait theory and behaviours: focusing upon leaders

The idea that leaders' personalities, behaviours and associated characteristics are significant and influential reflects a considerable body of work and research that explores a *trait theory* of leadership. The focus here is upon the leader as an individual, as a person, and as a performer of discernable acts, traits and behaviours. Popularised in the latter half of 20th century leadership research, the premise of trait theory is that those of *successful* leaders should be studied and emulated (Shriberg et al.,1997). Trait theory is believed to be founded on storytelling in leadership writing and research, as in telling the stories of great leaders and what made them great (Dym and Hutson, 2005). It has also encouraged and sustained a practice of diagnostic self and peer-evaluation, usually in the form of self-scoring questionnaires with pre-determined leadership attributes, amongst practising and emerging leaders seeking to define, develop and strengthen their core leadership traits and skills (Gordon, 2003).

Levine (2008) offers a concise analysis of trait theory, explaining that while, in its earliest form, it began to explain the 'complex set of individual characteristics that together form a leader', and was rooted in the idea that *great* leaders are 'born and not made', this notion is 'no longer uncritically accepted'. Trait theory itself has evolved to consider

its relative limitations in trying to establish a causal link between an individual possessing particular personal traits and ascending to successful leadership positions. Reiterations of trait theory have sought to categorise the many identified traits of effective leaders into broad characteristics or 'factors' that can somehow predict and evaluate leadership ability. Levine concludes that trait theory alone is not enough to explain or validate successful leadership, but can perhaps be used as a credible 'precondition' based on the amount of research done in this area.

Critics of this approach note that trait theorists have failed to provide a definitive list of leadership traits that can be changed or acquired in the training and development of leaders. The approach has historical limitations in failing to acknowledge the situated act of leadership and situational effects upon leaders, who may have traits that enable them to lead in one situation but not in another. Critics also point to the highly subjective interpretation of the value of individual traits amongst different researchers and writers (Northouse, 2007).

Conceptual models: constructing and defining leadership

From the study of individuals and their leadership traits and behaviours, there has also been a body of work that considers collective, adoptive approaches and practices, described as *models* of leadership. The more prevalent models in the leadership literature broadly represent theories of traits and behaviours, contingency and transformation, and include (though are not limited to):

Situational (or 'contingency') leadership
Situational leadership occurs when different leadership styles are adopted depending upon a particular situation. Developed by Blanchard and Hersey (Blanchard et al., 2004), leadership style is characterised depending upon the amount of direction and support given by a leader to followers within a given situation based on 'supportive' and 'directive' behaviours (directing, coaching,

supporting and delegating). Leadership styles are dependent upon the 'development level' of those being led; the chosen leadership style will directly correspond to the development level of the follower(s). Leadership as such is not only concerned with the individual characteristics of the leader, but with complex interactions between leader, followers, the situation or the historical moment in which they are operating (Maurik, 2001). Critics of the situational model assert that the relevant balance of concern for task and production with concern for people is now inappropriate when dealing with 'the realities of constant change' (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005).

Transactional leadership
Transactional leaders choose to motivate followers by inspiring a vision of what is to be accomplished in an approach that is task oriented, and facilitated by the ability to solve problems, plan and organise, and ultimately obtain results (Northouse, 2007). In a more systematic approach to leadership, the transactional model is perceived as having three dimensions: 'management-by-exception passive'; 'management-by-exception active'; 'contingent reward' (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005). Such definitions suggest a reactive needs-based approach to leadership. Maurik (2001) observes that many approaches to leadership have a transactional quality in ultimately representing a transaction between leader and follower, but that essentially transactional cultures are hierarchical and characterised by high levels of command and control.

Organisational leadership
The organisational model is associated with collective team leadership and linked to innovation and ideas within an organisational context: perceiving leadership itself as a component in the organisational system (Blanchard, 2007). The starting point for this is that, for an individual to function as an organisational leader, there needs to be established perspective, trust and community in that organisation. By treating leadership in this manner, it is argued that greater acknowledgement

can be made of the social context within which an organisation operates, and of the organisational objectives within that society. Designed to help develop a 'robust leadership strategy', the approach incorporates the following key themes: responses to external environment; mapping of the organisational context; identification of appropriate leadership culture; attaining leadership competence; managing leadership throughout the organisation (Northouse, 2007).

Emotional intelligence leadership model
Goleman (2003) asserts that a leader's success depends not on *what* they do but *how* they do it, which in turn depends on their ability to inspire and drive emotions. Goleman defines emotional intelligence leadership competencies as *self-awareness* (including emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence); *self-management* (self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative, optimism); *social awareness* (empathy, organisational awareness, service); *relationship management* (inspiration, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, teamwork and collaboration). Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) noted the growing significance of emotional intelligence when considering the future study of leadership, particularly with reference to the relationship between leadership and organisational behaviour. Accepted emotional and social relations of new paradigms of leadership include self-awareness; emotional resilience; intuitiveness and interpersonal sensitivity. Emotional maturity is also cited as a key competency within the trait theory debate, and is considered to be a key attribute of effective individual leadership (Maurik, 2001).

Transformational leadership
The transformational model is similar in approach to the organisational theory, but places a greater emotional emphasis on the individual to inspire organisational leadership. The transformational leader is an effective agent of change, who thinks beyond the conventional bounds of the immediate situation and identifies opportunities for growth

and increased effectiveness (Maurik, 2001). Transformational leadership seeks to motivate others by appealing to higher ideals and moral values, with the relevant leaders being expected to create a sense of trust, incorporating long-term vision, empowerment and coaching. Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) describe the transformational model as the 'dominant approach to studying leadership'. Recent research conducted by key proponents and analysts of the transformational model (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005) reports a new paradigm in transformational leadership which challenges 'heroic' approaches to leadership and focuses on the development of the individual within an organisational context. Using a UK sample of NHS managers at all levels, the most important aspect of transformational leadership was revealed to be 'valuing others' (genuine concern for others' well being and development). Integrity was also regarded as an important contextual leadership variable in accordance with the public sector service ethic.

Practising leadership: considering the act of leading

Whilst the leadership models outlined above have been positioned as the analysis and definition of accepted *norms* of leadership, researchers and writers are also interested in *leading in action*. This is the situated act of leading: what actually happens in the moment and what might have been more effective, rather than accepted and perhaps *chosen* models of collective leadership and *assumed* traits or behaviours.

Riggio and Conger (2007) note, in their edited collection of writing and research on different elements of leadership practice, that leading effectively is essentially complicated because of the frequent caveat 'it depends': good leadership involves doing the right thing in particular circumstances, accounting for the task, followers, situation, timing and process. This more detailed consideration of the practice of leading in action has evolved in tandem with a focus on leadership

development and the practice of learning to lead. This again brings the practice of leading back to the individual and their actions in becoming leaders, above and beyond personalities and behaviours.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, leadership development has become part of contemporary educational culture, symbolised by the plethora of graduate, undergraduate and professional courses and centres established for that purpose (Shriberg et al.,1997). Turnbull, James and Ladkin (2008) observe certain patterns in interventionist strategies in leadership development. These include the development of individual leader's characteristics and behaviours; the idea that leadership development can 'fix' existing deficits; and leadership as a contextualised activity.

Thomas (2004) states that existing organisational leaders have an obligation not just to continually develop themselves, but also to enable and support the development of emerging leaders via training, reading, analysing and following the example of 'good' leaders, and by assessing, monitoring and improving their own performance.

Learning leadership therefore requires the freedom to practise leadership and critically reflect on our own representations of leadership and its emotional and cognitive complexity (Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2003). It is this notion of reflection on practice that must now inform the cultural and creative sectors as we move forward in developing our own theoretical frameworks of leadership that can build on the generic developments outlined above.

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14 Leadership through partnership

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This piece explores the opportunities that partnership working creates and the challenges of leading partnerships involving many organisations with sometimes disparate goals and values who have been encouraged to join a partnership because of a financial incentive. Leading a partnership means identifying wider outcomes and revisiting them constantly to build and sustain partner commitment. In a partnership, the leader is a facilitator, creating a shared vision, keeping project goals in focus and ensuring that decisions are made and understood. This paper explores the benefits of investing time up front to agree goals, to establish trust, to agree good meeting practice and behaviours, and to decide on roles and who will lead on what. It outlines the opportunity for distributed leadership, and how a shared venture can encourage people to build their confidence and experiment with new approaches which are sustainable and therefore last beyond the project.

It is explained that all relationships require a little give and take. This is untrue. Any partnership demands that we give and give and give and at the last, as we flop into our graves exhausted, we are told that we didn't give enough (Quentin Crisp).

Why work in partnership when it is so much easier to go it alone? In my experience, organisations usually partner up because they want something from the arrangement, and don't always think about what they can give. A few years ago, I ran a couple of partnership working events where I asked people what motivated their organisations to work in partnership. At the top of almost everyone's list was the money. 'It's what funders expect us to do' and 'It means we can get hold of funds for a project that's been on the cards for a while' were typical responses. Let us consider the following scenario. One organisation comes up with a bright idea for a project and offers a financial carrot to others to join in. The project gets underway, those not in the lead trail behind, it becomes increasingly cumbersome and time consuming to manage, people get disillusioned or drop out and partnership fatigue sets in. This is not always the case, but this situation may well resonate with your own experience.

Leading a partnership takes an inordinate amount of thinking, listening, talking and learning – along with a fair amount of give and take. Leading a large partnership can be particularly complex and challenging. Over the last few years, I have worked on and off with a very large partnership of nine national museums on a project to bring together their online collections and develop shared learning resources. I worked with the project leader early on, coaching and running partnership workshops. Then towards the end, I was involved in evaluating learning and helping to establish a legacy for the project. There were some big challenges. Two that stand out were the technological incompatibilities and the pressure to deliver results for each partner on their own terms. The task was made more complex by the disparate nature of the organisations in terms of their scale, staff expertise, collections, levels of digitisation and the sophistication of their existing web resources. Even more significantly, each museum came to the partnership with a unique educational vision and very different aspirations and expectations.

Galvanising and leading the partners was a challenge. The project leader needed to hold the vision when others were losing focus. We learned several things from this project. First, that it was vital to understand what was motivating each partner and to be honest about what the project could deliver – these two things were not always concordant. Second, in a project with so many partners, it was important to work with those who were committed and active, and not to spend too much time cajoling those whose priorities had shifted. Third and finally, the project leader would advise anyone working in this way to get some

coaching and support – it can be a lonely place.

A collaboration becomes a genuine partnership when each partner signs up to delivering benefits that extend beyond their own institution. A successful partnership leader will focus on these wider outcomes and revisit them constantly with the other partners to build and sustain this commitment. So the leader is a facilitator, creating a shared vision and keeping project goals in focus. At the same time, the leader needs to ensure that decisions are made and understood – and crack the whip if things are not being delivered.

The partnership leader needs to encourage honesty and draw out differences early on. I facilitated one museums partnership that had received a substantial grant to build a high level advocacy programme around their collections. It soon became clear that one of the smaller partners had imagined this would be an opportunity to produce teachers' packs. Their disappointment some way into the process might not have arisen had there been an honest exchange of expectations and clarity at an earlier stage.

Investing time up front to agree goals and establish trust is worthwhile. Early sessions can be used to agree good meeting practice and behaviours, to decide on roles and agree who will lead on what – an essential dimension of a genuine partnership. It is an opportunity to practice distributed leadership. Smaller partners can build their capability by taking a leading role in one aspect of the project and not always relying on the designated lead partner. This commits everyone to sorting out the problems as well as sharing the success.

A shared venture can encourage people to try new things. A positive outcome of the national museums project, for example, was that people were prepared to risk trying new approaches to using technology, including social networking and user-generated content. They developed the confidence to apply these new approaches back in their own workplaces, beyond the project.

Leadership matters at every level. During research on partnerships undertaken for the National Museum Directors Conference and MLA

(Kingshurst, 2006), we heard about one national museum director who had travelled to Newcastle from London to give his support for the launch of a new learning partnership involving his museum. This symbolic gesture made a considerable impression on all the staff.

Although some partnerships develop and flourish organically, others often falter. Leading a partnership requires great people skills, a facilitative style and a willingness to have honest conversations about common needs and differences at the very start. This takes time and, unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to success.

Acknowledgements

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A successful partnership leader will focus on ... wider outcomes and revisit them constantly with the other partners to build and sustain this commitment

15 Thoughts from a train: on leadership

Tony Heaton
Chief Executive, Shape Arts

Tony Heaton operates in the parallel worlds of organisational leader and sculptor. Prior to working at Shape, he was Director of Holton Lee, creating an infrastructure that included the award-winning Faith House gallery, studios and accommodation, primarily for disabled people.

This paper is a personal reflection on leadership by accident not design: entrepreneurial, evolutionary and with disability being the probable motivational factor. I refer to disability not in respect of the actual impairment, but the experience of oppression and discrimination and the refusal to be constrained or travel third class.

Small children and cultural leaders perhaps share two things in common: a sense of wonder for the world and the ability to constantly ask the question, 'Why?'

For cultural leaders, this sense of wonder can be translated into how we might harness innovation into our organisations to make them better. We should ask the question 'Why?' to anyone and everyone who is kind enough to tell us anything about the performance of our organisation: our service; how we do things; and how we might do things better.

To do this, leaders need to have their heads above the desk. I am often asked what I do and I often say, 'As little as possible'. It's a tongue-in-cheek response, but if leaders are too immersed in the day-to-day minutiae of their organisation, then they will not see it within the wider context. I have held onto a quotation but lost grip of where it came from, but it is something like: 'See distant things as if they are close and close things from a distance.' For me, this translates into having a very clear vision of where you want your organisation to be, how it will look and what and who you will need to take you there. Painting this vision to everyone, constantly, will help to make it real, even though that future may be distant. The people you talk to are the people who will help you realise the vision. Close day-to-day challenges often benefit from a distant, objective and cool approach rather than knee-jerk solutions; this sometimes takes courage, particularly if those around you are clamouring for action.

I think some leaders are formed and some are natural leaders. Traits of leadership can be acquired and leadership does not have to be a constant; different people in most dynamic organisations will take on a leadership role at some point. One of my favourite analogies is when birds fly in 'V' formation, there is clearly a bird at the front but the leadership changes throughout the journey, as each bird has a special relationship pattern to the birds in its proximity. This results in the emergence of harmonious self-organising patterns. I believe that it is important for this also to happen in organisations.

As an obviously disabled person – I am a wheelchair user – I see, almost daily, looks of disbelief or surprise when people realise I lead an organisation, even though I have successfully led organisations for over 12 years and have chaired organisations for longer. Many of the disabled people I know are creative, flexible and lateral problem solvers, resilient, constantly responding to change, consistently challenging low expectations – they have to be, just to get through life. For instance, getting out of bed in the morning may have needed the organising and managing of a 'personal assistance' team and meeting the challenges of so-called 'public' transport and the general inaccessibility of the built environment requires real tenacity.

Leaders should appear to do very little and delegate ruthlessly, they should listen and spend time dreaming about their organisations

However, there is still prejudice and a reluctance, particularly among the larger disability organisations (never mind the mainstream), to employ disabled people to lead organisations, even though these very organisations should be best placed to offer leadership training, mentoring, advice and guidance. These organisations have not learned from discrimination and have done disabled people a great disservice in reinforcing the negative stereotypes that many people hold about disabled people. Is this because these organisations only promote people like themselves and cannot see disabled people beyond the recipients of the care and control tactics they perpetuate within their organisations? If true, I would argue that this is because often we promote the wrong type of leaders.

Some leaders are picked because they are very good at what they do within the organisation; they are plucked from their productivity on the 'shop floor' and become management fodder. This approach can lead to both a loss of productivity and the creation of yet another bad or ineffective manager.

Leaders should appear to do very little and delegate ruthlessly; they should listen, think and spend time dreaming about their organisations. Plato considered contemplation to be the highest form of human activity, the aim of life being to see life rightly, not to change the world. In our 'busy' age we should constantly question what we are busy doing.

So, what is it that makes our organisations good, or with the potential to be great? What are the leadership qualities required; who are the people who are pulling the organisation into the future, rather than being pushed by the past; and how do we part company with those that hold us back? Good leaders need to surround themselves with the best possible team. I have worked with good teams and with no team, and I know which I prefer. Building the team takes great skill and discernment; an understanding of people's preferred learning styles; and perhaps more importantly, making sure they understand yours. If they don't, you are likely to face real problems which will distract you from your purpose.

Some of the most useful and insightful observations I have benefited from come from volunteers or those on the edge of an organisation. Perhaps this is because they have not 'bought into' the corporate view, are not immersed in the organisation and can see more clearly? Good leaders share as much as possible: by sharing, we sell the vision and encourage a response. Those on the edge of the organisation may be more candid in their view than those within the organisational hierarchy and, while they may not always tell you what you want to hear, it's vital to listen to their response.

If I were to define my own road to leadership, it would be one of entrepreneurial and evolutionary development. It was unplanned and I would assert that most of us cannot remember why we took most of the important decisions in our lives that we did.

I was already termed a so-called leader long before I had any specific leadership training. When I did, it was a revelation of sorts. Back in 2001, the Association for Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) promoted a course on process work, entitled *Leadership in the 21st Century*, facilitated by Dr Max Schupbach. When I arrived at the training room, there was not a flip chart in sight. We sat in a circle waiting for the leader to begin. We kept waiting until someone asked when we would start. After a few seconds thought, Max said we had already started. He then talked a little about the self-organising tendency. More silence. Some people started to complain and said they had paid to come to *learn* about leadership; someone else said that was precisely what was happening – we were learning about leadership through the process of seeing what would unfold, who would come forward to lead. It was amazing how angry some people became. They felt cheated, but it was a revelation to me about predetermined expectation and institutional thinking. Some people left – I like to think to go back to those large disability charities they were leading...

We talked about unconscious rank and why most white, non-disabled, middle class men walk into a room that is full of people like them without even noticing it. This was interesting to me, the only disabled person in the room who was talking with the only Black person in the room. In many ways, the notion of process work is not about rules of behaviour but about relationships, as the individuals, the community and the organisation change and flow throughout the journey.

I used the word evolutionary above, because some of the things we talked about were comfortingly familiar and I was doing them, I just didn't know the management speak to define them. The same with entrepreneurial, because I have always had my way of doing things, constantly looking to do deals and maximise advantages. You can't do this with your head down on your desk. I was always confident to succeed; I don't know if this was arrogance, perhaps, which prompted the need to work on humility and kindness, but I think having confidence gives confidence. This is particularly important in relationships with funders, who have to be sure they are getting great results and best value for money, and also to those who will be helping to realise the vision you are painting.

I think perhaps that in the creative and cultural sector, in looking inwards we take creative thinking for granted. If we do, then this is a mistake; it is one of our most important assets on which we need to capitalise.

As an artist, I am encouraged to experiment, discard ideas and take risks; this is not considered as failure. As such, I think it is important for our sector to be more open to failure; to fail better; to embrace thinking differently; to be counter-intuitive; and to take these approaches out to others as an asset. Collaborations with others outside of the sector could be fertile ground: artists on the boards of banks and financial institutions; artists as school governors; artists in those places where there is institutional thinking; artists infiltrating places that might be hostile. My daughter is a school teacher and showed some of my work in an art class. At the end, a child asked if she was sad because her dad was dead. My daughter explained that I was very much alive, but I wonder how many other young children think of artists as people from a long dead historical past rather than leaders shaping the future.

Ezra Pound (1954) described artists as the antenna of the race. As such, artist-leaders should be aware and free to think, explore, fail, test and push boundaries. This is increasingly difficult in a world that becomes more and more regulated by a tick box mentality, where decision-makers are terrified to make decisions because of fear of failure, and a new prurience and hypocrisy strangle honest debate.

To achieve this would need real discernment and some bravery from funders, and openness from their institutions, but if the creative and cultural sector only has a dialogue with itself, then our value will be very limited and will atrophy. The McMaster review (2008) considered how public sector support for the arts can encourage excellence, risk taking and innovation, but I must have missed the pots of money available and the present climate makes people more risk averse. All the greatest discoveries and journeys have been laden with risk. We need to look outward to new opportunities and engage with those outside the sector, in talk away from 'art-speak'.

This vision thing, and the idea of leadership, reminds me of something Picasso is reputed to have said, that in essence he had spent his whole lifetime learning to paint like a child. This takes me back to the starting point of this reflection. Being open; constantly asking the question 'Why?'; listening; discerning through all the monkey chatter and busyness what is right for your organisation; and, with the combination of experience and vision, successfully painting that vision to others – it is then that the direction becomes clearer.

I thought I would finish with a quotation from Hans Moravec, a pioneer in robotics, who talks of the future, or perhaps even the present. It comes from John Gray's provocative book, *Straw Dogs* (2002). Moravec said, 'Almost all humans work to amuse other humans.'

This may come as a great relief to all in the sector.

I wrote this on the night train between Florence and Paris, one of the advantages of not flying, even in 'V' formation.

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Small children and cultural leaders perhaps share two things in common: a sense of wonder for the world and the ability to constantly ask the question, 'Why?'

16 The improvising leader: developing leadership capacity through improvisation

This paper explores the link between leadership behaviours and improvisational practices. Using practical examples of leadership in action, I set out to demonstrate how improvisation can be used experientially to develop intuition and mindfulness as it relates to leadership or person-centred interventions such as coaching and facilitation. Drawing on a range of current literature, not only from the field of leadership theory, but also spirituality and positive psychology, I introduce and explore a range of concepts such as 'positive deviants' and 'neoteric leaders'. I demonstrate how an improvisational philosophy or 'mindset' can help develop creativity, curiosity, flexibility, resilience and mindfulness in an age of uncertainty. Finally, by using the real-world example of long-form improvisation (group storytelling), I explore the concept of 'meaning-making' in relation to creativity and leadership; of giving ourselves over to the service of something bigger than ourselves; of creative flow; removal of the ego; and how these key human qualities and behaviours can in turn enhance our capacity as leaders.

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It is 8pm in an upstairs room of a pub in central London. For the past ten minutes, people have been slowly filing through the door, drinks in hand. Half of the room is occupied by rows of chairs, and the scraping of chair legs against the hard wooden floor as people find their places can be heard over the general hubbub. Finally the room is full, every chair is occupied and faces turn in anticipation to the empty half of the room before them and the five people standing against the walls at either side of the space. The door is closed, the overhead lights are switched off and an expectant silence fills the room. After a brief pause, the spotlights at the back of the room flood the empty space with light and, almost immediately, one of the five performers steps into the pool of light. The play has begun.

What makes this play unusual is that it is entirely unscripted. Not one of those five people waiting to step onstage has a clue what will happen over the next 20, 40, 60 minutes. Unless they have taken suggestions from the audience beforehand to weave into their story, as some improvising groups do, they may have very little idea even as to what their play will be about. All they know is that they need to tell a convincing narrative, with a beginning, a middle and an end, by creating characters and exploring relationships between those characters. In order to do this, they must stay alert to every single nuance, every single clue that is created in the moment, and work together to shape the story and bring it to a satisfactory resolution.

What can the skills displayed by this group of improvisers teach us about leadership? Is it possible that an experiential understanding and a basic training in improvisation can help improve leadership capacity in individuals and organisations?

Before I trained and practised as a coach and facilitator, I was an experienced improviser, first as a dancer and then in long-form improvisation performance, i.e. building a group narrative, creating characters and scenes in the moment to tell a story that can last anything from 20 minutes to over an hour long. I worked and trained with a number of improv groups, and was a long-term member of a group that specialised in long-form improvisation.

As a writer and leadership coach and facilitator, I have encountered much leadership theory, and listened to the stories of many leaders in the creative and cultural sector and beyond. Leaders of small creative enterprises may experience slightly different issues from those leading large cultural institutions, but generally the same themes keep returning time and time again: those of managing relationships – with colleagues, peers, employees, managers, associates, clients and stakeholders – and managing change, both organisational (i.e. internal) and change due to external factors, e.g. cuts in funding, or the economic climate. While they care deeply about the people they work with and the industry they work within, many leaders report being exhausted from managing conflicting

demands and expectations, being pulled in multiple directions, feeling unprepared or inadequately trained for the role and from an expectation (usually self-imposed) of being the 'saviour'. Burdened with the weight of responsibility, many have reported that, ironically, as leaders and managers in the creative sector, they are experiencing fewer and fewer opportunities to access and implement their own natural creativity.

As I have embarked on my own leadership journey, the most important thing I have learned is to regard leadership as a process, rather than a role. It is essentially about relationships: cultivating them, building them and nurturing them from a shared sense of purpose, vision and values; sharing and exchanging knowledge; learning, adapting, evolving, remaining alert to changes from all directions; and *allowing oneself to be changed in the process*. It requires an ongoing willingness to be challenged and to learn from others and from personal experience. As I have learned more about coaching and facilitation as it applies to leadership, the more I find myself being reminded of the basic principles I have learned in the studio and practised and witnessed in theatres with my improvising associates and peers.

> Improvisation invites participation, liberates good ideas, and challenges players to work at the height of their intelligence (Bonifer, 2009).

An experienced team of improvisers can make the creation of a long-form play in the moment seem effortless, to the point that only certain moments will remind the audience that this is unscripted. There are two key concepts of improvisation that relate directly to leadership and which are crucial to note:

- first, the seemingly effortless ease with which these improvisers operate is not gained lightly, by some fluke of genius. Rather, their ability to pull together to tell a story is the result of constant practice and commitment to a set of principles that form the backbone of good improvisational practice

- second, not one of these improvisers works in isolation. The success of the group depends on the commitment, energy and application of every single member of the team pulling together, working hard for the sake of something both of themselves and at the same time bigger than themselves. In improvisation, there is no room for the ego

We are already improvisers

The link between improvisation and leadership is increasingly recognised in the world of business. Many improvisation groups now offer corporate leadership training packages, such as GameChangers in the USA and the Spontaneity Shop here in the UK. The Applied Improvisation Network (AIN) formed as a result of this recognition. The AIN is an international members' network of individual practitioners and organisations that use improvisation training in their work in the fields of business, education or work with specific groups, such as mental health and homelessness charities. One of the members of the network, Remy Bertrand, is the director of Imprology, a training organisation offering improvisation-based public classes and tailored learning events.

> Leadership is at the heart of improvisation so I deal with the topic in each and every one of my interventions. Improvisation teaches you one simple trick: the capacity to send and receive at the same time, to produce and listen simultaneously. It's beautifully simple yet counter-intuitive and some people will get it immediately while others will need more practice. But our competitive instincts are closer to the surface than our collaborative ones, and it is a skill that most people will need to practice regularly if they want to really own it. However, collective improvisation is all about self-organisation and distributed leadership, so workshop participants deal with the subject at every step of the journey (Betrand, 2009).

In his paper *Don't Script, Improvise!* (2009) Mike Bonifer, CEO of GameChangers, compares organisations to an archaic, labour-intensive industrial age machine. Most organisations, he argues, continue to operate like machines, with different parts and components, departments and hierarchies, where the communication is top-down and hampered by sluggish, bureaucratic systems. In the modern, networked world, he argues, we must be more flexible, more agile, more fleet-of-foot, more responsive.

In order to survive in business, today's leaders must be skilled improvisers. Bonifer's analogy of the organisation as an industrial machine is mirrored in Margaret Wheatley's *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (2005), in which she looks at how self-organising systems are mirrored in nature. Both Bonifer and Wheatley use the analogy of an organisation as a living system as opposed to a machine, growing organically, adapting and evolving – *being* and *responding* to change rather than *managing* it.

Improvisation offers that direct experience of working within a living system, something that is created in the moment, from the inside out, involving all of those who are part of the system, as opposed to a machine, where the features are designed outside of the system and then engineered in.

When describing the impact of a leadership learning intervention that involves a process of reflection, such as coaching, mentoring, facilitation or improvisation training, many of my clients, colleagues and associates (me included) have described the experience as 'transformative', and their journey as a personal, 'spiritual' one. Many of the philosophies pertaining to improvisation and leadership, such as focusing on the now, living in the moment, accepting what is happening and allowing the ego to fall away, do indeed mirror the teachings of spiritual leaders or the philosophies espoused by the positive psychology movement. The unique potential of improvisation is that it is purely experiential. Unlike philosophy or business psychology or leadership theory, it cannot be

gleaned from a book – it must be lived and practised in order to be learned.

So, how can an improvisational mindset help develop our leadership capacity?

It demands that we pay attention

Accept, then act (Tolle, 2005).

Improvisation is a great way of teaching us to be mindful, of focusing our attention with *all* of our senses on what is actually happening in the moment, rather than what we perceive to be happening. In this way, it is an excellent tool for leaders, particularly coaches and mentors and anyone who works in a facilitative capacity. Only when we accept what is happening can we respond truthfully.

In order for an improvisation scene to hold together, all of the players must remain alert to what is actually happening onstage, in the moment, which requires great listening skills. Even those players who are not involved in a scene must remain alert to what is unfolding onstage, as everything that happens impacts upon the story, i.e. has *meaning-making potential*. In improv, there is no such place as 'off-stage'. In the same way, leaders who remain alert to what is happening in their teams, their organisations and their industry, are able to identify changes to the 'narrative' as they happen and identify what is really important to people, the places where people find meaning, and respond accordingly.

By paying attention, and being mindful of the present, rather than living in the past or projecting ourselves into an unknown future, we commit ourselves 100% to the moment. In this way, we open up the possibility of entering what Csikszentmihalyi (2002) calls 'the flow state', when we are working at the height of our creative capacities and the work seems almost effortless. Flow always happens in the present. To enter into this state as an improviser is an immensely joyous experience. Having experienced creative flow in the

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In order to survive in business, today's leaders must be skilled improvisers

moment, as leaders we can recognise this state in ourselves, and use this in our work with others.

It does wonders for one's capacity to work collaboratively. You learn not to fall in love with your own idea and to keep an ear out for what is actually happening around you. You also learn to stop anticipating in the vain attempt to future-proof everything you're about to say, because this stops you from listening to what others are saying. Counter-intuitively, this is what makes one creative: to stop trying so hard and instead surrender to the moment and really, really listen (Bertrand, 2009).

It demands that we give up 'control'

By setting aside egos and individual concerns to focus on the game of the scene, players are able to create new, productive realities (Bonifer, 2009).

Control and command is a dying model for leadership. Improvisation gives us the unique opportunity to experience distributed leadership in action. Letting go (of ideas, of status) and remaining open, flexible and curious are essential improvisation skills. It demands that we are generous and trust in the intelligence, creativity and leadership capacity of others.

Effective leadership, like good improvisation, demands that we get our ego out of the way. It demands that we focus on productivity, rather than power; that we are humble enough to defer to others with more expertise in order to get things done, rather than stubbornly hanging on to our status for the sake of control. It demands that we are flexible and open and are prepared to let go for the sake of the narrative, or the 'thing' we are creating, whether that be a project, a play, a team, a relationship, a piece of art or an organisation. An improvisational mindset requires that we acknowledge there are myriad possibilities and choices, and that we are open and curious enough to not dismiss these out of hand because they do not fit with our rigid world view of how something should be.

It demands that we take responsibility for ourselves and our actions

Before all else, take responsibility for your own actions. The best thing you can do for your team, company or brand is play the game as well as you can play it. How your co-workers and other scene partners play along is usually beyond your control. Improvisers don't ask permission. They act. And they don't ask forgiveness either. They learn and move on (Bonifer, 2009).

While we must remain open and flexible, as improvisers we must also learn to commit to action and stand by those actions. A key improv principle is 'Look after yourself first!' It reminds us that though we are usually unable to control the behavioural responses of others, we do have control over our own behaviour, and in the service of the 'thing' we are creating (the play, the team, the project, the company) we owe it to ourselves and others to commit 100%. Margaret Wheatley (2005) recounts the story of a school head teacher who created three very simple principles for all – students, staff and teachers – to follow: 'Take care of yourself, take care of each other, take care of *this place*'. By adhering to such simple rules, everyone found agreement as to what was appropriate behaviour within the school. If we apply 'this place' more broadly to mean the 'thing' we are creating, this gives us a sense of connection with others and how our own behaviour and actions impact upon the bigger picture.

It demands that we get involved and work together

The solution is each other. If we can rely on one another we can cope with almost anything. Without each other, we retreat into fear (Wheatley, 2005).

Good teamwork requires the involvement of everyone. It demands that we become active participants in the process, rather than passively await instruction. In long-form improvisation, concepts of hierarchy, line management, team leaders and department heads do not exist. Communication flows around the group, rather than top-down. The *characters* may be in conflict, but the *actors* are all in agreement and are of equal importance to the story. As the protagonists become established, it is often the 'helper' characters, i.e. those in the minor roles, who are able to move the story on by creating an emotional or practical dilemma for the key characters to overcome.

In organisations, these minor characters, or 'change agents', are often the company's secret weapon. A *Harvard Business Review* article (Pascale and Sternin, 2006) uses the term 'positive deviants' to describe these change agents. They are people who do not play a major role in the company but are doing things in radically different, innovative ways. They are the ones posing and asking the difficult questions and coming up with solutions independently, and by so doing are helping construct and shape the narrative of the organisation from behind the scenes. A company that embraces an improvisational culture will also acknowledge and harness the creative potential of this valuable resource.

It demands that we take risks and embrace 'failure'

There is something very liberating about being given – and giving yourself – permission to fail. Improvisation demands that we change our mindset about the concept of 'failure' and see challenges as learning opportunities. It demands that we fail, and fail well, learn from the experience, pick ourselves up and try again. It's no accident that improvisation is associated with comedy – there's a delicious delight in seeing people taking risks and failing and trying again, against all the odds. Improvisation increases our adaptive capacity, and teaches us to take our work – but not ourselves – seriously. It teaches us not to allow our own egos to get in the way of the work we are doing or the thing we are

creating. And it teaches us to let go of the outcome and look out for those 'happy accidents' that can be the fortunate by-product of a perceived 'failure'.

Harvard leadership experts Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas (2002) even coined the phrase 'neoteric' to describe the kind of leader who embodies this quality, borrowing a term from biology – neoteny – meaning 'the retention of juvenile characteristics in the adults of a species'. They suggested that the flexibility, openness and capacity for 'bouncing back' displayed by the leaders they studied resembled a kind of eternal youth. People who are 'neoteric' retain their youthful curiosity, playfulness, eagerness, fearlessness, warmth and energy. And improvisation demands – and offers – those qualities in spades:

You've got to try and you've got to fail and try again before you see the light. As a facilitator, I realised that it wasn't about me and what I do. Letting people fail is counter intuitive but if you don't let them have their own experience, you're not helping. Once you realise that you don't need to prevail in everything you do, the sky is the limit (Bertrand, 2009).

Conclusion

Obviously a few improvisation workshops are not going to transform our organisations overnight. But we have to be prepared to move away from quick-fixes and look towards a longer-term, more philosophical and spiritual approach to leadership.

Bertrand acknowledges that it is impossible to teach 'leadership' through a single workshop:

You've got to get the basic skills first, such as trust and commitment, and a single workshop in isolation won't allow for the necessary time to dwell into the leadership conundrum. But once you've made it to that stage, you can start having fun with leadership styles and inject a bit more intelligence and flexibility in the way(s) you relate and interact with others (Bertrand, 2009).

He recalls one participant who was experiencing difficulties with a particular stage of development:

Then I realised that he was no longer working in front of strangers, which in a sense is easy, but in front of friends. The same applies to corporate training. Taking risks in front of people you know is much harder. You have to be self-forgiving and you have to reconcile yourself with the possibility of failure in order to succeed. Great leadership, in a sense, is about a form of honesty that is really hard to fake (Bertrand, 2009).

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The Applied Improvisation Network www.appliedimprov.ning.com

Imprology www.imprology.com

17 The place of practical wisdom in cultural leadership development

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Janet Summerton is a critical friend with individuals and organisations, facilitating professional growth and change. She has held many roles in the arts field, written extensively about the nature of the work of artists and arts organisations, and established the MA in Arts & Cultural Management at University of Sussex.

This article makes a case for balancing our grassroots, or tacit, knowledge with the vast array of publicly available ideas and theories regarding leadership, management and organisation. It also challenges the widely-held assumption that theory generated elsewhere (i.e. outside the cultural sector) is superior to our own wisdom. It sketches a picture of the working practices of people in this field, the groups and organisations they create, inhabit and work alongside, suggesting there is a wider diversity of practice than often commonly recognised or appreciated. The analysis of practice reveals that the concept of cultural leadership and cultural leadership development are far from straightforward. Through continually collecting the intelligence or wisdom from the field and keeping up-to-date on current understandings regarding professional learning, I believe we can create ever more effective cultural leadership development activities.

Introduction

A number of distinct practices, conventions and discourses have evolved across the spectrum of arts and cultural activity. These have been influenced by their specific contexts – art forms, histories, geographic location (rural through to urban) and orientation. High quality leadership and management competence appropriate to these various contexts are clearly evident. Cultural workers and enterprises often have an abundance of practical knowledge and wisdom. Many have developed their expertise 'on the job' – by doing it. With a few exceptions, there are no strict professional requirements for much work in the arts and cultural field. Learning through experience, be it by trial and error or with and from colleagues, has been the norm.

There are characteristics across our field which distinguish one type of activity from another, and from non arts and cultural activity. It is also the case that the opposite is true – there are similarities with other kinds of businesses and third sector activities. But one of the most intriguing distinctions which has yet to be explored in detail, concerns the impact of artistic creative processes on leadership, management and organisation. There is also the issue of the deeply embedded values and ethos which guide the work.[1]

In this article I outline characteristics such as ways of working and organisational forms and discuss some ideas about leadership and professional development, pointing out how a great deal of our practice does not fit, and arguably should not be *made* to fit, the best known models of leadership, management and organisation.

If professional development is to increase knowledge and wisdom, it needs to be well grounded in a comprehensive understanding of these matters. Developing this understanding is not a straightforward task, for ours is not a profession keen to spend a great deal of time reflecting on how and why we work and organise in the ways we do. The evidence is fragmented, often beneath the surface and constantly changing. Collecting wisdom, then, needs to be a purposeful and ongoing matter.

Knowledge is best described as a dynamic collection of information and skills, while wisdom combines that knowledge with experience and good judgement. By nature, practical knowledge is often unspoken and unwritten.

Working patterns

Detailing working patterns is also not straightforward. We used to think we could adequately describe the field by talking of three quite separate groups of people: artists, staff in arts organisations and bureaucrats, with different sets

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[1] Sets of values vary across the field, but include those related to public service, third sector, creative innovation, priorities etc.

Leadership in our field is evident both in organisational settings and in wider communities of practice. We have, however, been singularly reticent about studying our own leadership practices

of competencies ascribed to each. We might have remembered to add the vast numbers of volunteers, including board members. But during the last 20 years, in many parts of our field the boundaries between these groups have been dissolving. The space between artists and arts organisations has shrunk, with increasing numbers of practitioners working collaboratively to form groups and organisations.

In 2005 this was described as follows:

... current paradigms about working lives make it easy to understand people who take a primarily clear series of steps ascending through increasingly responsible positions in organisational settings. Collected Wisdom values and respects the significant contribution these people make to the profession of arts and cultural management. In parallel we think it is important to include the people managing and leading who may not be as visible – those who move in and out of organisations, establish new ones and work semi-independently. Regardless, no two working paths are identical, nor obvious...There is considerable evidence here of people who would fit Charles Handy's description of *New Alchemists* – those who create something out of nothing (Handy, 1999). While it may be easy to conclude that their activity is nothing other than the meandering of a creative spirit, along the way, their work has considerable impact on the field and frequently they are creating work and opportunities for others. In other words, we think there is value in appreciating the full spectrum of paths travelled through the arts and cultural landscape (Summerton and Hutchins, 2005).

Our world is inhabited by large numbers of people who value the opportunity to take different roles and positions, either serially or simultaneously. So, for example, they may be self-employed, employed and doing unpaid work all at the same time.

It makes little sense to try to generalise about the motives and ambitions of people in these

different circumstances. When Charles Handy first discussed the concept of portfolio working, he explained that it gave the individual the opportunity to take on different activity for different reasons, looking for different kinds of satisfaction from each (Handy, 1994). Sometimes choices are driven by necessity: to earn money, to make time for caring responsibilities or to have financial security. Often motives relate to the kind of experience each offers and choices are made on the basis of satisfying particular ambitions (not necessarily those typically associated with progressive career development). For example, in a recent study of 300 arts practitioners over a one year period, similar numbers moved *into* education work as moved *out* (Summerton, 2003).[2]

What proof do we have that such is the case? Extensive qualitative, sometimes called 'anecdotal', evidence from the field itself – the wisdom! Most tools currently in use for producing quantitative evidence are inadequate for truly representing such complexity. Nor does the majority of available literature adequately analyse these kinds of working patterns.

Organisations

It was Gareth Morgan who first described organisations as 'figments of our imagination' and gave some examples including the 'rigid hierarchy', the 'project' and the 'matrix organisation' (Morgan, 1993).

Similarly, Henry Mintzberg (1989) wrote about a number of organisational configurations. However, both writers describe organisations in the corporate world.

Helmet Anheier (2000), a voluntary sector management writer, proposed that the orientation of organisations could be thought of as resembling either 'palaces' or 'tents'. Among other characteristics, he considered that the

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2 *Dimensions of Practice*, a study into the working practices and ambitions of arts practitioners in which multifaceted practice was extensive, working lives fluid and flexible.

palace orientation valued predictability rather than improvisation, borrowed solutions rather than invented them and favoured accounting over goal flexibility. In contrast, the tent orientation emphasised creativity, immediacy and initiative, looking for neither harmony nor durability of solutions. Anheier does point out that rarely is an organisation exclusively of one orientation.

But do any of these ideas comprehensively capture the diversity of the ways in which we operate? The answer is no, in part because there are two particular kinds of activity which are not included. One is the individual who works in (and out of) a number of organisations simultaneously – the specialist. The other is the unpaid worker, who serves on boards and take on other management and leadership responsibilities. So a more inclusive concept for arts and cultural organisations could be as follows:

It might be useful to think of arts organisations as changing coalitions of people who may be paid or unpaid, in the conventional senses. These people vary in their levels of commitment and involvement, and have a multiplicity of personal goals or motives. They are bound together in a common or mutually beneficial pursuit with high expectations of opportunities for personal effectiveness and fulfilment. They choose to give high priority to these and other non pecuniary values which include the creation of artistic and cultural work.They inhabit and create organisational forms which may be temporary, occasional or more long lasting, but are certainly likely to be dynamic, fluid and flexible. They are less likely to leave the responsibility of management in the hands of one designated individual... (Summerton and Kay, 1995).

For some years I have conducted informal research into the configurations of organisations in our field. In this research I asked people to give the numbers of people in their organisations in six different categories: full time employees, part time employees, fee paid specialists, occasional employees, board members, other volunteers. The results revealed a consistent pattern of a small core

of full and part time employees, working alongside a much larger number from the remaining four categories.

The involvement of such large numbers of people who are not employees throws into question the borrowed concept of scale of organisations, designating them as micro, small, medium and large, which only counts the paid employees.

Groups

There is a considerable amount of arts and cultural activity that takes place in purposeful groups rather than formal organisations. Made substantially easier by technological advances, cultural workers group and regroup in various configurations shaped, for the most part, by the principle of 'form follows function'. In addition, there is 'just enough' management and organisation. These collaborations may be temporary and occasional collaborations or quite long-lasting. The degree to which they operate face-to-face will vary, with some only operating on a virtual level. Purposes, too, will vary and include working together on projects or providing mutual support. Much of this activity appears to demonstrate the inclination to work individually *and* collectively, as discussed by writers such as Bilton (2007) and Leadbeater and Oakley (1999).

Leadership(s)?

Given this kaleidoscopic view of the field, it is not surprising that various kinds of leadership will operate in, and be best suited to, different situations. Those acquainted with the literature on leadership will see here parallels with the concept of 'situated leadership', in which leadership varies according to, and indeed is influenced by, specific situations or context.

Leadership in our field is evident both in organisational settings and in wider 'communities of practice'. We have, however, been singularly reticent about studying our own leadership

So can we describe what we mean by leadership, in a manner which more truly reflects our practice(s)?

practices. Is it because the notion of the heroic leader has been so dominant and doesn't accord with our own experience? Is it that we need to 'liberate leadership from the received wisdom which… is increasingly narrow, corporate-inspired and individualistic?' (Sinclair, 2006). And until we do as Sinclair suggests, I suspect it will remain difficult for us to appreciate and talk in any detail about leadership in the arts and cultural context.

In many of our organisations, especially those constituted as companies limited by guarantee, boards and staff have joint responsibility… [so] the most appropriate leadership models come under the relatively new labels of 'distributed', 'shared', or 'relational'. In these models the leadership role is fluid, shared by various people in a group according to their capabilities as conditions change.[3]

The management writer Henry Mintzberg recently posed the question, 'Isn't it time to think of our organisations as communities of co-operation and in so doing put leadership in its place alongside other social processes?'[4]

The distributed and shared leadership styles are also prevalent in non-formal organisational settings. This accords with the idea that 'distributed leadership highlights leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals' (Bennett et al., 2003).

So can we describe what we mean by leadership, in a manner which more truly reflects our practice(s)? Perhaps we could think of it as a spirit or attitude in which a group of people or community of practice (in or outwith an organisational framework) confidently progress towards a desired and agreed future, with the journey guided by clear and shared values. Such a position is difficult to adopt and maintain, however, when the prevailing focus in the field still remains rooted in the concept of deficits in our practices. The message is that leadership 'non excellence' is a question of 'not knowing' the formulas which, at

heart, reinforce the (outmoded and inappropriate) heroic leadership model. It takes a great deal of confidence to overcome suppression of the true value of our own practices.

In the more dispersed parts of our field it may be useful to investigate individuals or groups who are seen to be pathfinders, in order to identify the characteristics of their leadership activities. More collected wisdom!

Conclusion

Across our field there is considerable competence and expertise. There are logics and coherence as well as observable patterns. But we have not yet had the time, inclination or the opportunity to shift this wisdom from its primarily tacit, unwritten or unarticulated state. National initiatives such as the Cultural Leadership Programme and Mission Models Money have done much to stimulate interest in developing wisdom. But if cultural leadership is to continue to blossom, we will need to keep collecting the practical wisdom, refining our understanding of the significant influence of context.

How? I would suggest through narratives of experience, reflection and – perhaps most importantly – through dialogue. Current understandings of learning in professional communities often refer to the power of 'dialogue' as a process in which our learning grows exponentially. Dialogue here refers to purposeful conversations, undertaken in situations where there is time for quality interactions and reflection.

There also needs to be a commitment to share the wisdom and knowledge more widely. Action research or something similar[5] would provide a good vehicle, with its principle of stimulating learning for the individual, the group and the wider community of practice.

The challenge for the next generation of leadership development activity is ensuring that the dialogue is meaningful and rooted in our practices: practitioner-led programmes with the action research commitments to share and build the authentic wisdom.

Networking and networks have been promoted for some time. These kinds of activity could also be harnessed into even more purposeful action in collecting the wisdom and stimulating robust discussion and debate. True learning communities!

A better balance, then, is called for. There are obvious gaps between management, leadership and organisational theories and many of our practices. There are a number of organisations in the arts and cultural sector which closely resemble those in the corporate world, but for those who are more distant, we have a duty to consider their ways of working and organising in light of their *own* frames of reference, or theoretical underpinnings. There is nothing so practical as a good theory.[6]

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3 From *Currents in Governance* by the author (2008). See GOLD website (in references) for further information.
4 *The Leadership Debate with Henry Mintzberg, Community-ship is the Answer*, published in Financial Times, 23 October 2006,available at www.i-open.org/Resources/CommunityShip.

5 Collaborative enquiry or appreciative enquiry, for example. See also Hadfield, M. 2004. *From Networking to School Networks to 'Networked' Learning: The Challenge for the Networked Learning Communities Programme*, p. 11-12 at www.ncsl.org.uk/networked for a discussion about levels of learning and fields of knowledge.

6 This phrase is much quoted and appeared originally in Lewin, K. 1951. *Field theory in social science; selected theoretical papers*. D. Cartwright, ed. New York: Harper & Row.

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