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Managing teams through change

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“Often at the beginning change does not seem naturally rewarding to teams – it’s only as they start to experience the change that they get it in terms of the benefits.”



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Change

— introduction

Overall, within the arts, cultural and heritage sector less people are doing more work and, compared to other sectors, there's more emotional attachment to the work and organisation.

In a climate of uncertainty and change, people think carefully about what they commit to. As part of self-preservation they don't quite invest the same amount of themselves and are more open-minded about their options for work.

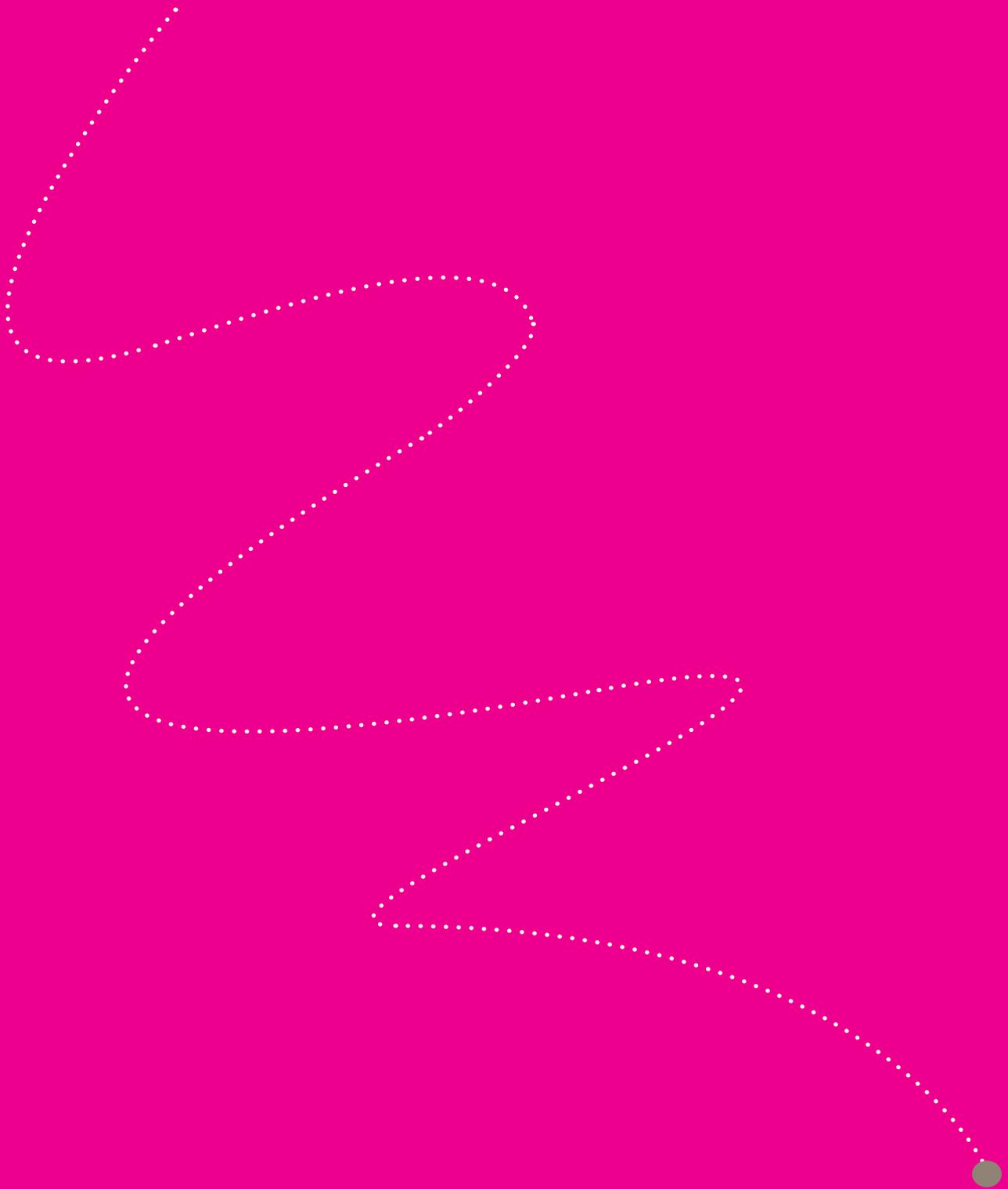
Smaller arts organisations tend to go through changes or cycles of changes more often. Personnel changes have a big impact on a smaller organisation. One change in personnel, for example a team leader leaving, can create immediate structural changes.

However, smaller, growing organisations tend to be more nimble because their gearing up for change and have the mentality of growing and changing. They're in the mindset of getting ready for the next stage, whether that's new products, services or partnerships.

Small organisations therefore experience less incremental changes but instead experience bigger changes more often as a result of their size.

Larger arts organisations experience a different pattern of change. There will be more incremental changes with maybe occasional big, structural changes.

Planning for change



Planning for change

— the collective wisdom

Communication is key when you're planning for change. When you're thinking about how it's going to be managed internally it's important to involve others early on even if it's to ensure that it's taking advantage of the **collective wisdom**.

The planning process is likely to begin with the Board and Senior Management Team (SMT). If the 'change' is strategic then they're the ones who are going to lead on that. However, the planning process should quickly involve conversations with operational staff — talking about the 'change' does no harm as it won't be vague or become scary.

Set up a process so that people think together to decide what is needed — this will involve the SMT and Board — but it might involve operational staff too.

Remember:

If the change needs to happen very quickly — a dramatic change in an emergency — then the planning process will be quick and autocratic.



Think about...

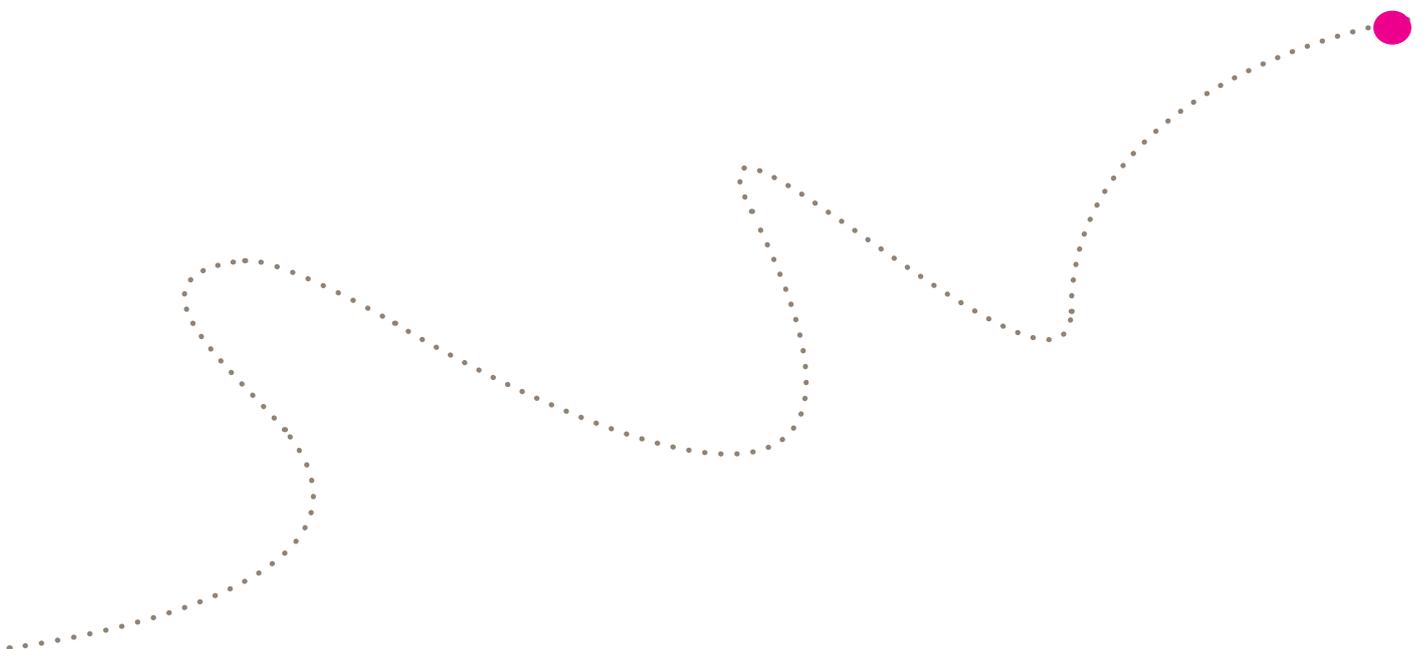
What is the change?

Why are you doing the change?
— the **vision**

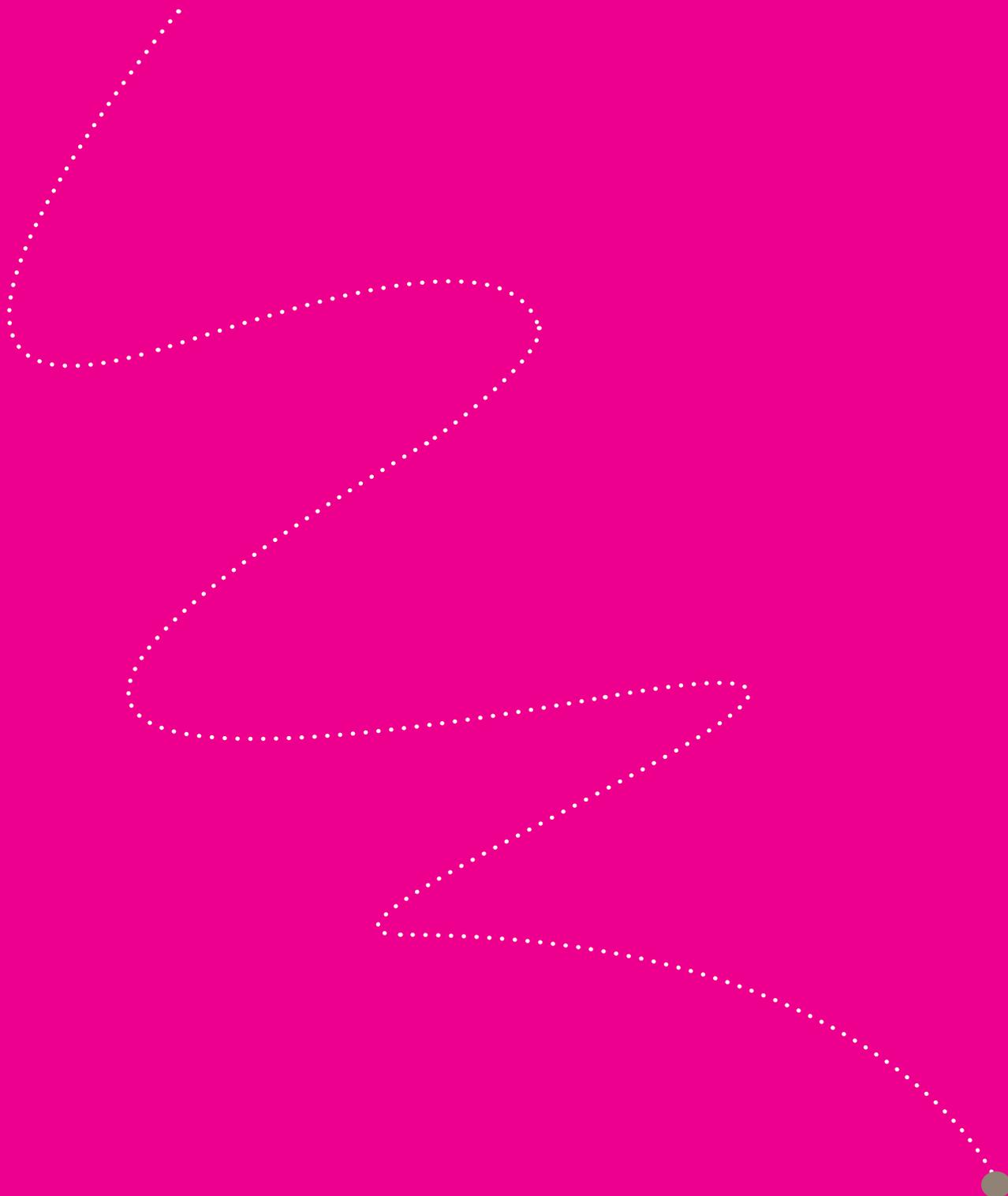
When are you implementing the change? — the **benefits**

Who is going to be affected?

How are you going to involve and communicate all this to your team?



Consultation and communication



Consultation and communication

— involving staff

Critical to successfully managing change is **information flow** and existing structures can be utilised to involve and communicate with staff. Mechanisms such as:

- **team meetings** — add a ten-minute update to the agenda of team meetings to talk through the 'change'
- **regular emails** — for example, a fortnightly newsletter to give updates on what's happening
- **regular check-ins** — all staff check-in for 10-15 minutes in a huddle — this is particularly useful if there's likely to be some anxiety or problem in communicating the change.

Even if nothing changes over the coming months, staff still get an update. If a vacuum builds up where there's no information or updates then staff can interpret that vacuum quite negatively.

Any internal problems arising from the 'change' are usually as a result of poor communication.

Do's and don'ts

- Try to avoid being vague
- Try to be specific when you can
- As soon as information is known get it out as quickly as reasonably possible

Shared responsibility

— change as a collective enterprise

You may have someone who leads on the implementation of the 'change', however the key to change is to try to share **responsibility** of the 'change' across as many people as possible. Having **buy-in** will help make the implementation of change successful.

Steps to consider

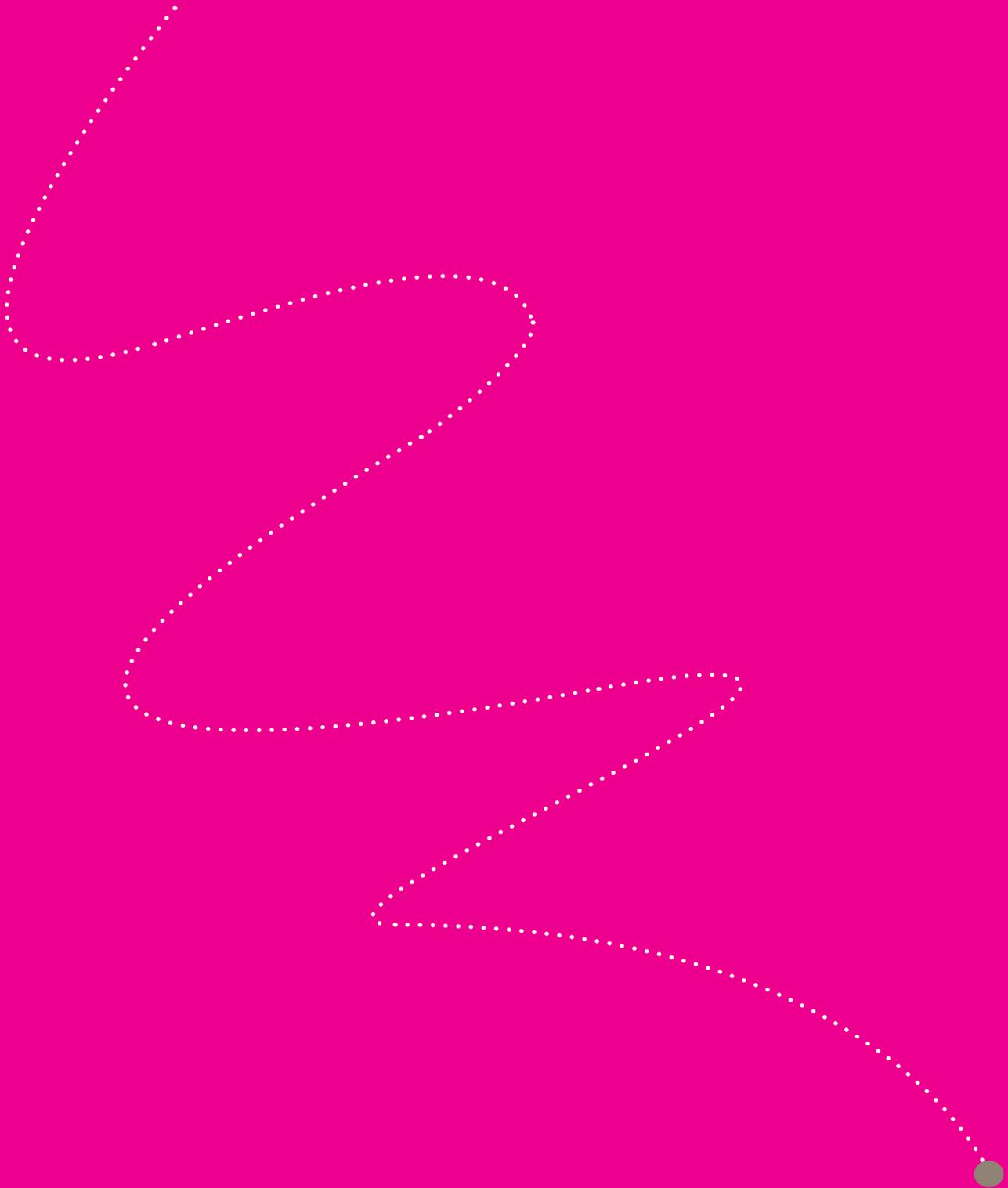
- Raise staff's **awareness** of the 'change'
- **Desire** for change — help staff understand why the change is happening so that they feel it's a good thing that's happening
- **Knowledge** about what's going to happen
- **Training** and **implementation**

What to avoid?

Avoid the perception that there are groups of staff that are in the "know" and others that aren't as this can lead to resentment and rumour.



The emotional journey of change



Implementing change

— involvement is key

Generally speaking, within the arts, cultural and heritage sector there's often more emotional attachment to the organisation and what that organisation does and stands for.

This may well mean that there will be some **emotional resistance** to proposed changes as staff are attached to how things were — the team, structure and routines — they therefore resist the change and can be unhappy that changes are being implemented and question why the changes are happening.

It's therefore important to allow staff to voice their concerns and for those concerns to be listened to. The leadership need to 'back-off' from getting involved in a ping-pong conversation and instead really **listen** to staff fears and concerns, and identify where compromises could be made.

As staff engage with some aspects of the 'change' it's at that point that staff should be **involved** as productively as possible.

Knowing staff strengths — identify how they can be involved in the 'change'. For example, new post / staff member joining the organisation — give staff responsibility for part of the induction or preparation of the new member of staff joining.

Staff will start to make sense of the changes both emotionally and practically in terms of how the change is going to impact them.

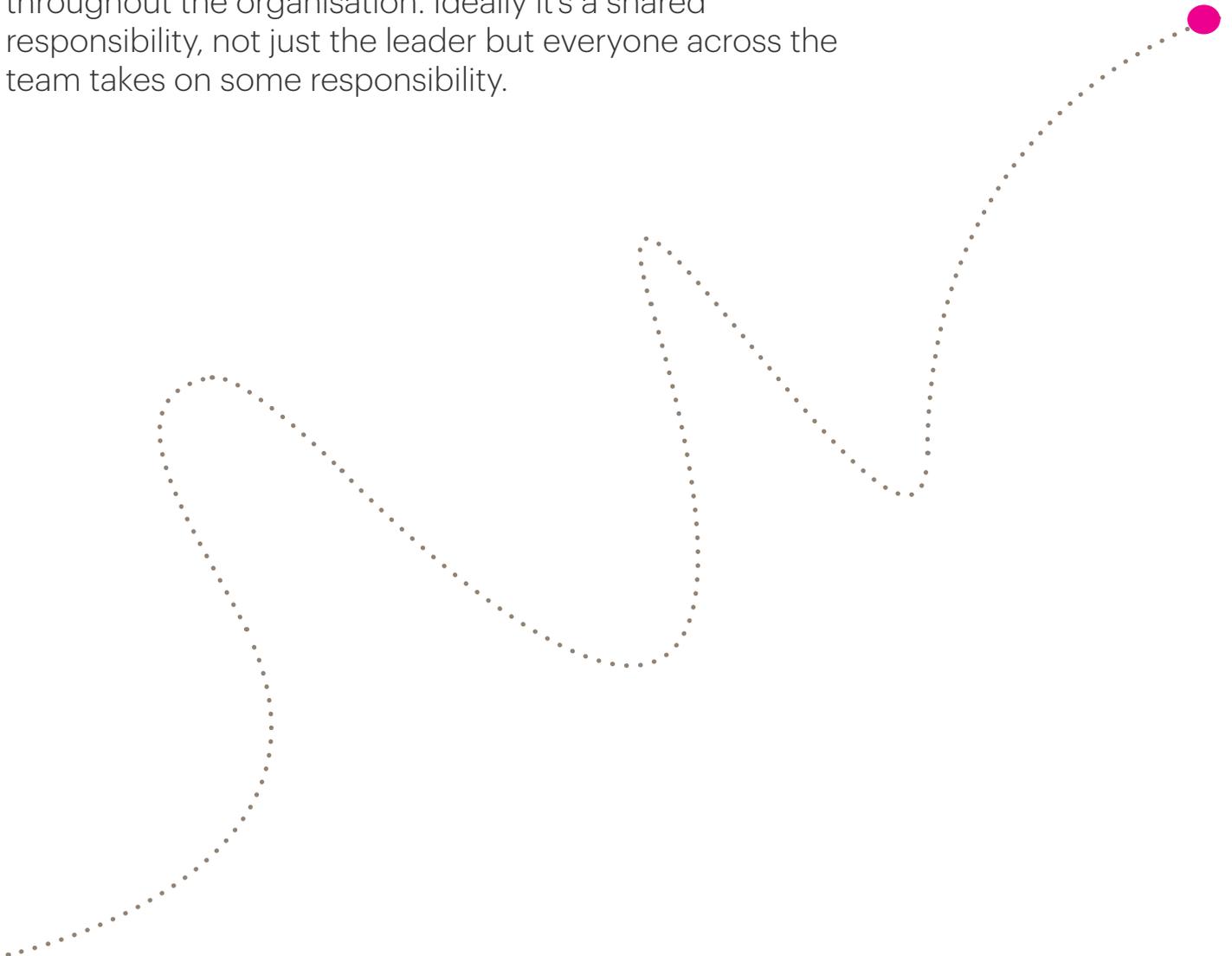
Vision and acceptance

When staff are not totally resistant nor committed to the 'change' then it's important to be positive about the vision of the change — what you're trying to achieve and why — a **positive vision** of what you're doing and why.

If your team thinks this is a change for change sake then you'll experience the tyranny of high turnover

Understanding what the changes are and why the changes are taking place will help teams to start to commit as they understand what's happening and why. Once they experience the changes and see the gains and advantages of those changes then teams will start to adjust how they do things and adapt to new routines.

All this will require **strong leadership** — giving good examples of change that should be seen and felt throughout the organisation. Ideally it's a shared responsibility, not just the leader but everyone across the team takes on some responsibility.



Conflict and resistance

— the power of listening

It's really natural for there to be some resistance to change. A team is like a family — the number of hours teams spend together and, particularly in the arts, cultural and heritage sector, this may also involve evening work — strong bonds can be established.

Like a family, a team might be dysfunctional at times. Change can sometimes disrupt the family dynamics and cause **conflict** and **resistance** — which is very natural.

When this happens it's important for leadership to temporarily let go of their agenda and really **listen**. Hear the frustration — let it be expressed — and listen to the concerns and don't try to immediately fix the problem or give quick answers — just listen.

Then ask what can we do? More importantly, what can we do together? An open question that explores what the team are resisting — don't jump to solutions until you've explored the problem behind the resistance.

Remember:

When people are allowed to talk through what's troubling them and are listened to — that process in itself helps people to work through the conflict and can result in a better resolution just by talking.

This usually results in a shared agreement as to what needs to be done differently or what needs to be adjusted.

If individuals are treated respectfully and are engaged then they can plan on how they're going to adapt to the 'change'. By being listened to they can think for themselves and make decisions about what they want to do within the 'change'. Sometimes people decide to leave or move on and that might be the right decision.

Leaders need to treat teams and individuals with:

- empathy
- honesty
- in a real way
- with no sense of favouritism or that management are hiding something

The more resistance the more team leaders will need to **check-in** in terms of team member's welfare or whatever's concerning them. This can be a quick check-in but it does make a big difference.

Drawing on the collective wisdom keep the discussions open and ask your team:

- What are we noticing?
- What's happening?
- What's going well?
- What's not going well?

Remember:

The most important thing is for teams to notice what's going on and to talk about the 'change' in a way that's constructive and not destructive. Using simple communication channels will allow this to happen.

Avoiding conflict and grievances

— dealing with uncertainty

A good way of avoiding conflict is to establish a working agreement with your team on how to do the 'change'. This isn't a signed contract but an informal agreement on what the team agrees to do while going through the 'change'.

For example:

- In the uncertainty that we're going to be experiencing let's agree not to gossip — if we're not sure about something then we'll talk to management
- Management will commit to letting staff know what's going on as soon as they know and that's to be trusted by teams

This type of **group agreement** is a good way of strengthening trust and to avoid resistance and grievances. Mutual understanding established early in the 'change' process can help create a sense of **working together** and help avoid resistance, conflict and potentially grievance.

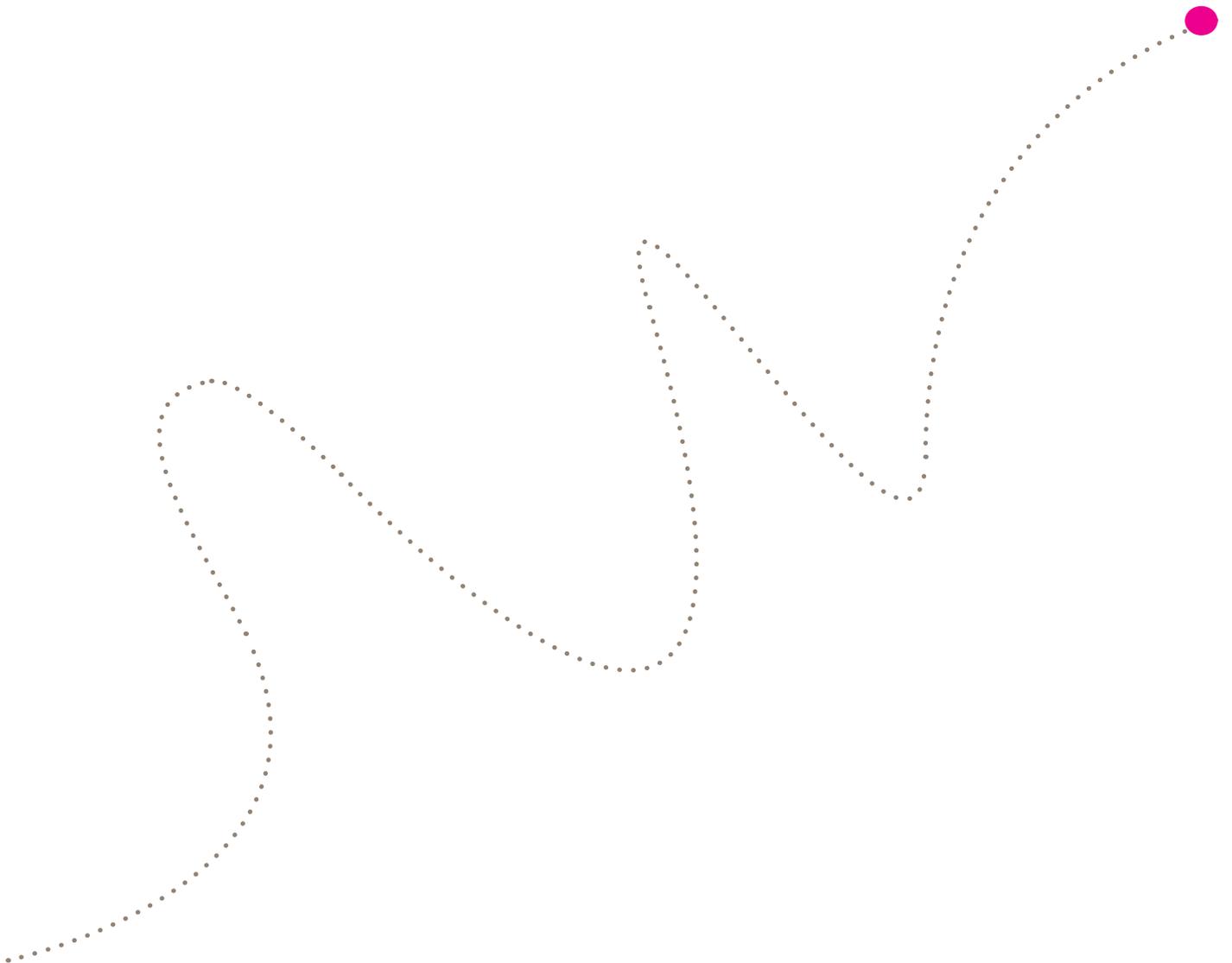
This is often missed out as the understanding is assumed or it's not attended to as management and teams are too scared to have these types of conversations.

Think about...

How to we make this work?

How do we want to be together?

How do we feel?



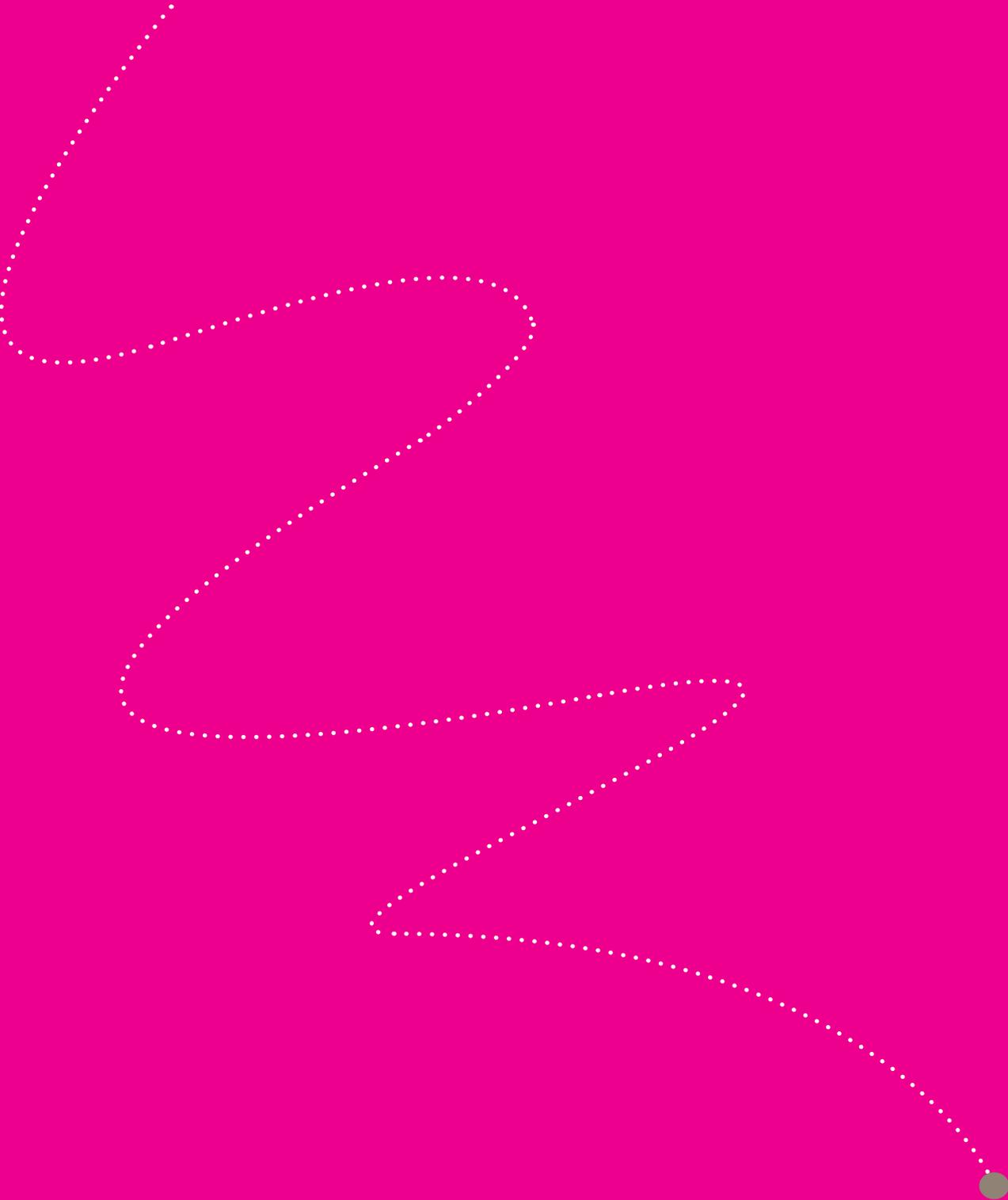
HR support

If you're going through a restructure you might want to consider outsourcing HR support during that period of change. For a fee you can get HR support, which is especially helpful if your restructuring is likely to involve redundancy.

There's a clear framework and legal requirements when dealing with redundancy. Specific steps need to be undertaken in order to ensure that people's rights are adhered to. So, it's important to seek professional HR support to help with management changes.



Celebrating success



Acknowledge achievement

— the spirit of encouragement

Arts, heritage and cultural organisations are often working to and above capacity. The busier the team the more need for encouragement, positive feedback and being recognised for the work they're doing.

"The most effective way of influencing behaviour is unsolicited positive feedback when someone isn't expecting it."

As managers — when you see someone doing something differently or they've demonstrated that they're embracing the change or using their initiative — acknowledge that action with a positive comment in a team meeting or a thank you in an email. As long as the praise is sincere and not said for the sake of it — it makes a huge difference in terms of **embedding change**.



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