



*We believe that cultural organisations that put audiences at the heart of their thinking and actions are stronger, more relevant and more valued. To have meaning, this needs to be embraced by people at every level of the organisation.
What does this mean for cultural leaders?*

Programme Report

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Introduction

This report describes the *From Them To Us* programme devised for CultureHive 2014 - 16, and shares some of the ideas that emerged, with an eye to the future in terms of further research and debate.

From Them To Us was an exploration of the role of leaders and leadership styles in actively encouraging rich, multidimensional relationships with diverse audiences and the wider public. We looked at how leaders are effecting a change towards 'audience focus', a term we have used as shorthand to describe a more democratic and engaged culture. The programme combined research and a leadership programme of workshops, which enabled 12 cultural leaders to reflect on and develop their own approach.

Conclusions Summarised

In summary, we reached the conclusion that many practitioners in the cultural sector lead in a distinctively inclusive way, which favours access, equality and audience focus. These leaders have a vision to connect with broad and diverse audiences, They take steps to understand a wide range of perspectives, take creative inspiration from that understanding, and are committed to making change as a result. We frame their approach as 'inclusive leadership'. Although all have their own approach, they share beliefs and values which translate into leadership behaviours which seem new to the cultural sector. Their approach creates a positive organisational culture, re-orientates organisations around audiences, and builds thriving, more diverse audiences.

Background Thinking

Our focus was on leadership in engaging the public, rather than management, business modelling, or other aspects of organisational or creative practice.

Leadership is ... associated with taking an organisation into the future, finding opportunities that are coming at it faster and faster and successfully exploiting those opportunities. Leadership is about vision, about people buying in, about empowerment and, most of all, about producing useful change. Leadership is not about attributes, it's about behaviour. John Kotter

Audiences are changing, seeking more active and creative relationships with companies and organisations in which they can contribute and from which all gain. This creates the opportunity for richer and deeper, multi-dimensional encounters, experiences and exchanges.



Attitudes are changing, and a more diverse society is harder to predict. Habits are changing more quickly. So, organisations can't respond with long term planning as they may have done before. We need to become more agile and entrepreneurial. A starting question was: how do we respond?

From the outset, we were particularly interested in the notion of adaptive leadership, which acknowledges and responds to the external factors of the moment.

An external push from technology, which is constantly creating new ways to engage with physical and virtual audiences. An external pull from audiences, who are more powerful and more active than ever before, expecting organisations to be shaped around their needs. Audiences First, Historic Royal Palaces

We were also interested in working towards positive and useful change, leaving behind a focus on problems. Our approach was based on posing future- and solution-focused questions, which enable people to generate their own insights, rather than through explaining and giving advice.

For insights to be useful, they need to be generated from within, not given to individuals as conclusions.... people will experience the adrenaline-like rush of insight only if they go through the process of making connections themselves. David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz

The Leadership Programme

From Them To Us began with a series of informal conversations and interviews¹ and a series of debates. In turn, these informed an intensive six-month leadership programme. It brought together twelve leaders from across the cultural sector to examine how they might guide their organisations to build more diverse, inclusive audiences without compromising on quality.

Funded by Arts Council England and devised by programme director Gaby Porter ([Gaby Porter+ Associates](#)), with Anne Torreggiani and Ivan Wadeson ([The Audience Agency](#)), and Richard Watts ([people make it work](#)) the programme explored the broad themes of purpose, place and people.

¹ Ivan Wadeson's piece for *Arts Professional* offered a summary of first-stage thinking

AMA have developed this as an online course:

<http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/266/article/challenge-change>

In response to the programme and the debate it sparked, *From Them To Us* has moved into a new phase of exploration. What is it that some leaders are doing differently to create vibrant, diverse audiences? What is their story of change? A series of case studies will be available.

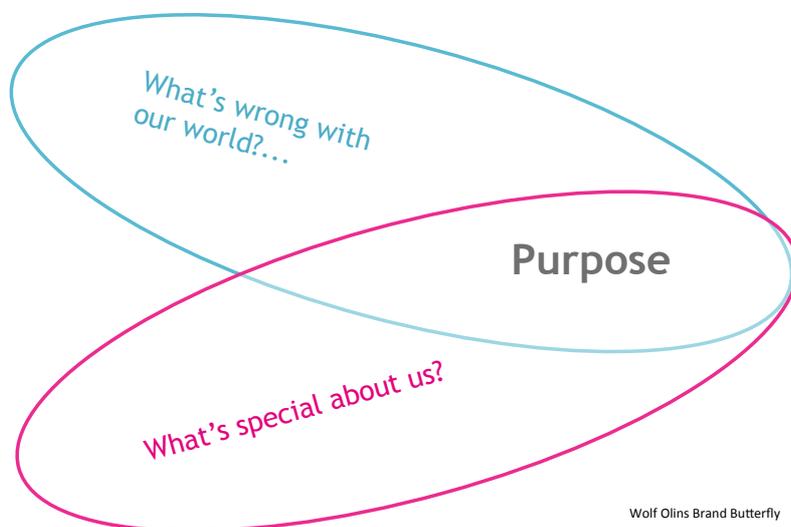
The Leadership Programme and Areas of Exploration

Workshop 1 - Leading with Purpose

In this first session, we focused on the centrality of purpose as the foundation of a people-focused approach for organisations. Led by Robert Jones, Head of New Thinking at [Wolff Olins](#)², the group discussed how a clear sense of purpose could create commitment amongst consumers, employees and partners of companies and organisations, increase value, and drive social change.

Using Wolff Olins' butterfly diagram which defines purpose as the intersection of 'What's wrong with the world?' and 'What's special about us/my organisation?', we reflected on current 'purpose' and the value of re-shaping with a more explicit sense of public responsibility. Who are we here for, what do people want or need from us?

Most leaders taking part explored this approach to purpose in their own organisations, and



reflected that it is a positive tool in creating a step change towards a more external focus.

This workshop also included a case study from Ken Arnold, then Head of Programmes at [Wellcome Collection](#), about his own leadership and how the organisation's distinctive purpose influenced the redesign of their building. He described how, to make the building more public, it

was redesigned as an 'upside down swimming pool' plunging audiences into the collections at the start, drawing them into spaces for reflection and exploration as they move up the building. We returned numerous times to some of his themes, including the idea that being

² See <http://www.a-m-a.co.uk/ama-and-wolff-olins-launch-building-resilience/>

audience-focused can be as much about being distinctive and offering alternatives to the mainstream as it can be about being accessible. We need to understand our audiences in a nuanced way.

Workshop 2 - A Sense of Place

In our second workshop at the Library of Birmingham, we explored the power of cultural leadership in the civic arena. Anne Torreggiani facilitated this session, exploring the leadership learning of being a place-maker, or 'practising the art of belonging'.

Most of the organisations represented among the leaders in the programme are key players in their communities. This has a major impact on their relevance and their ability not just to reach, but also to connect people from across those communities. This position may drive revenue but more critically, generates social value, and fuels the creative renewal of each organisation. All the leaders felt their organisations contribute to a sense of place and promote civic pride as an extension of their organisational purpose.

But we understood this community role to be about more than acting as a cultural broker, contributor to local agendas or producer of discrete community projects. Civic leadership is about bringing culture and creativity into local partnerships, and "the way we do things around here". It's a two-way street, which also demands actively inviting the local community to make art, culture and history with you, and to inform the cultural offer you make.

By looking at past examples and sharing their own extensive experience - good and bad - the group identified the leadership challenges of co-creation and community involvement. They asked what does it take for leaders to create a sense of public 'belonging': they

- offer programming that is relevant to their audiences and local communities, and find imaginative ways to understand what is 'relevant',
- invest time in civic partnerships with strategic local partners to extend their reach and build trust amongst communities,
- offer many routes into the organisation and actively pursue community involvement, decision making and creative participation which makes an impact across the full range of their work and staff,
- create a sense of conviviality.

The participants identified these personal leadership challenges:

- retaining clarity of vision as a leader while listening to many voices,
- ceding control as well as encouraging and enabling others to cede control,
- changing institutional habits,
- managing perceptions of quality - who are the arbiters, it's important to find the right context for each experience,
- sustaining the energy to drive this process and the commitment to broadening audiences across the organisation,
- sustaining relationships: enabling audiences or participants to migrate from a project relationship to becoming a long-term stakeholder,
- building and enabling creative teams with the right skills and sensibilities to work in an inclusive and participative way - its doesn't suit everyone,
- re-thinking the business models to make this work core and sustainable,
- taking a role in the wider community, influencing what happens beyond your own organisation.

The day included a case study from [Appetite Stoke](#), presented by Creative Producer, Gemma Thomas. As one of the Arts Council Creative People and Places programmes, Appetite Stoke's purpose is 'to get more people to experience and be inspired by the arts'. Gemma shared with the group what the organisation had learned from their activities and community partnerships. She also shared the key questions she recommends that any arts organisation should ask before embarking on a community participation project.

Workshop 3 - People: bringing people with us

The third workshop led by Richard Watts explored how we lead change, enabling staff and stakeholders to develop a more inclusive, audience-focused culture. Using case studies from Historic Royal Palaces and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and thinking about the principles of change management, we explored and discussed our own experience of re-aligning people, organisational processes and structures around purpose.

The day also included a case study from [Turner Contemporary](#), presented by Karen Elslea, Head of Learning. She shared the distinctive ways in which Turner Contemporary engages and listens to its people - from front of house teams to curators, visiting artists and visitors.



“Philosophical Enquiry” is central to the organisation’s approach to engagement - of both staff and public. The Enquiry creates an inclusive space in which people can share opinions, feedback and ideas. The gallery has used this technique to solve problems, plan future activity and develop a deep understanding of visitors’ personal responses.

Participants then trialled a philosophical enquiry centred on questions around audience focused leadership. It was a rich experience to which we returned in other conversations. The Enquiry is a simple process but allows for complexity of opinion and response, Turner Contemporary’s people are comfortable with it, and it forms the culture of the organisation - curious, open, listening. The group recommended Turner Contemporary as an important case study.

Workshop 4 - True North

Led by Russell Willis Taylor, independent consultant and formerly President and CEO of National Arts Strategies, our fourth workshop brought new tools into the mix, designed to help leaders develop direction.

Firstly, we touched on personal social and communication leadership styles and how these influence our preferences for extrovert or introvert working, leading from the front or the side. It was interesting to note that despite these personal preferences, the group still had shared values and behaviours, all putting an emphasis on openness, and inviting input and debate albeit in their preferred mode.

We experimented with an empathy mapping exercise to help ‘get inside the head’ of potential audience members, especially those least like ourselves. We then used empathy mapping to develop detailed positioning statements to connect each organisation with a specific, and often underrepresented, audience segment.

In this session, we also discussed the importance of audience segmentation as a way of conceptualising and managing difference and diversity.

We felt these tools could be valuable in taking staff and stakeholders with us, as a way of generating new ideas and encouraging experimentation.

Leadership Symposium

The four workshops culminated in a sector wide symposium discussing 21st century leadership and how to build responsive relationships with audiences without compromising on vision.

The day included a keynote from Russell Willis Taylor on how cultural organisations must work harder to remain relevant to their audiences. A panel of speakers including Bruce Coppock

(President and CEO of the [St Paul Chamber Orchestra](#)), Kully Thiarai (then Director of [Cast in Doncaster, now National Theatre Wales](#)), and Dame Fiona Reynolds (formerly Director-General of [National Trust](#)), shared their experiences of guiding their organisations to become more audience focused. Again, the sessions demonstrated that although all had launched very different practical strategies, they had in common a passion to prioritise the needs of audiences and had driven major institutional change as a result. All had used audience insight - from informal feedback to a huge segmentation exercise - as an inspiration for really imaginative new solutions to old problems.

The symposium concluded with a series of round table discussions prepared by the *From Them To Us* leaders, addressing the following key questions:

- 1) what benefits do organisations get from being audience focused?
- 2) how do we build commitment to audience focus in our organisations?
- 3) what interesting approaches are organisations adopting that practically enable greater audience focus to take root?
- 4) what does a truly audience focused organisation look like and do?
- 5) what can we do to keep audiences at the centre (given the hard times ahead)?

The ideas and suggestions from the roundtables³ were varied, and focused more on active audience development initiatives than overall models or leadership. Nevertheless, discussions informed conclusions and case studies.

Workshop 5 - Insights

Gaby Porter led a final reflective session for the leaders in the programme, to draw out the insights gained over the course of the programme. The discussions focused around two central questions:

- 1) what are the qualities, behaviours and practices of leading with an audience focus?
- 2) what are the actions that leaders can take to strengthen and cultivate these in yourself as a leader?

Their insights are reflected below.

³ Discussions were fully documented, and a table of comments is available.

In addition, participants were introduced to Action Learning and trailed an Action Learning Set as a way to continue their collaborative discussions and reflective practice after the end of the programme.



Emerging Questions

From Them To Us is an exploration of leaders and leadership styles to actively encourage rich, multidimensional relationships with diverse audiences and the wider public. As noted, our approach was based on posing future- and solution-focused questions, which enable people to generate their own insights, rather than through explaining and giving advice.

These then are the questions that emerged from the programme.

Is there a leadership style we might call audience-focused?

The group agreed that as leaders they shared a distinctive view: inclusive values, a strong sense of social purpose and an instinct to open out cultural institutions - their own and the wider sector. This perspective leads to behaviours we might bundle together as ‘inclusive leadership’, behaviours which may not have been the norm in cultural institutions, although most think behaviours among sector leaders are rapidly changing.

The group’s hypothesis is that ‘inclusive leadership’ generates significant results, in terms of social, creative and financial value. It can make for more engaged staff, more creative and connected communities, inspire artists and creative renewal, generate new revenue streams, and ultimately create more diverse and committed audiences. Can we prove it?

What are the hallmark behaviours?

Leadership is not about attributes, it's about behaviour. John Kotter

Throughout the programme, we returned to the idea that ‘inclusive leaders’ ask questions. They seek others’ perspectives, are able to hear many voices, handle many kinds of events and information without fear of being “knocked off course”. Indeed they set a course in the expectation of accommodating a multiplicity of views. We saw many examples of people who have exercised this curiosity. They are not afraid to be persuadable:

Persuadability is the genuine willingness and ability to change your mind in the face of new evidence. Being persuadable requires rejecting absolute certainty, treating your beliefs as temporary, and acknowledging the possibility that no matter how confident you are about any particular option—you could be wrong.’ [Al Pittampalli](#)

But once heard, people have expectations. Inclusive leaders adapt to give people space and encouragement to others, not just to say things differently, but to DO things their way. These leaders have to find appropriate ways of loosening control but within a strong, clear framework and actively managing risk. They are comfortable to enter the unknown or uncertain, and to cede control.

We noted the capacity to explore possibilities with others, in order to generate outcomes beyond what any individual might have imagined or created, and through this process increasing a shared commitment. There are lots of models for stakeholder involvement and ideation: everyone had their preferred approach developed with experience - in nearly all cases having learnt from mistakes. What is important is to share real power, but in a properly managed safe space.

These inclusive leaders also embrace a much more dynamic and reciprocal relationship with visitors, users and customers, recognising their desire to play a fuller part:

“...enlisting customers in a new relationship and fair exchange... expand[ing] the idea of value by creating one to one human experience to find new ways to grow. What new value can you create for people? And what new value can they create for you?” The New Mainstream, Wolff Olins 2014

Morton Smyth’s seminal research *Not For The Likes Of You* has been much quoted for observing that genuinely inclusive organisations “model internally what they wish to achieve externally”. We observed this again and again; leaders enabling everyone in the organisation to play their part towards larger purpose; unlocking the potential within each person in the team; encouraging multi-disciplinary approaches; nurturing partnerships with multiple stakeholders.

What is the Story of Change that drives this approach?

Cultural organisations can be a vital force for social change, fuelled by the personal commitment of the people that make them. For many cultural organisations in receipt of public funding and/ or with charitable status, social impact is key:

“Audiences First contains an important challenge - to put the people for whom we are doing our work at the centre of all our thinking. Only in that way will have the greatest possible public impact as a charity that we seek.” Michael Day, CEO, Historic Royal Palaces

The inclusive approach makes an organisation more relevant, more vibrant, more entrepreneurial and creates greater social, creative and financial value. Is there a theory of

change behind the style and approach, in which the generation of social value is a vital dimension?

*Theory of Change is more than a method for planning, but a form of **critical theory** that ensures a transparent distribution of power dynamics. Further, the process is necessarily inclusive of many perspectives and participants in achieving solutions.*

theoryofchange.org

What are the questions we need to ask ourselves?

What is our PURPOSE?

- Why should we do this?
- Why do we exist?
- Who are we here to serve, how?

Is our purpose a platform from which people can explore? How do we make things with people not for people?

What is our PLACE?

- How do we support and contribute to civic and creative life in our locality?
- Who makes this place worthwhile? How might we talk to/ work with them to add value for audiences and organisations, beyond what we could do ourselves?
- How might we work with others to create many points of contacts, routes, so that we create a stronger and wider sense of belonging among a more diverse audience?

How do we engage our PEOPLE - (us and them)?

- How can we build a team of question-makers around us? Questions to open up our thinking. Creativity in our work - not just in our 'product' or programme.
- What tools are we using to 'embed ourselves in the pathos of another person's life' or get into the shoes of our audiences? Empathy maps? Philosophical enquiry? Other?
- What do we do to enable people to 'sample before they buy'?
- How can we create an 'upside-down swimming pool' in our venues - with a shallow end: the further into the building you go, the deeper you delve?
- If people want to 'play as well as pay': how do we take inspiration?
- A leader/ leadership team?

The Case Studies: A Story of Change

By the end of the programme, the *From Them To Us* group concluded that something is changing. If not a new form of ‘audience focused leadership’, there is a new generation of cultural leaders emerging with a deep belief and commitment to a more inclusive culture, and an inclusive, curious leadership style which reflects that commitment.

As we scabble for resources, there’s an even greater imperative for this work. ‘If we can do it in such a way that it demonstrates more income and engagement, it will be very powerful. If not, where will we find our place? And how do we do it in such a way that it doesn’t feel quite luxurious?’ Programme Participant

The group asked us to complement their work by creating some simple case studies based on interviews with leaders recommended for exemplifying the inclusive style.

We will ask whether or not an inclusive leadership style yields results:

- why does this matter?
- audience focus: combined practice?
- what are the benefits ?
- how do we build commitment?
- what are the practical steps?
- what does a truly audience-focused organisation look like and do?
- what can we do to keep audiences at the centre?

Case Studies Interviews include

- Arnolfini
- BAC
- Bikeshed
- Derby Quad
- Derby Museums
- Historic Royal Palaces
- Turner Contemporary
- York Theatre Royal

Participants & Contributors

Programme devised by

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Anne Torreggiani - CEO, The Audience Agency

Richard Watts - Director, people make it work

Russell Willis Taylor - Independent Consultant, formerly President and CEO of National Arts Strategies

Contributors

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Karen Eslea - Head of Learning, Turner Contemporary

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The Audience Agency, 2016