

Are cultural organisations the best place to learn about cultural leadership?

Placements are a very obvious way to gain experience about how cultural organisations work from the inside. Spending a significant amount of time not as an 'extra pair of hands' but working on a key strategic project alongside senior leaders and their teams can offer a level of learning and insight that cannot be gained on a course or through seminars.

CLP are delivering or working with partners on a number of different models of placement – Peach Placements (Peaches), Powerbrokers International Leadership Placements (PILPs); International Placements for Creative Entrepreneurs (IPCEs) with the British Council; International Exchanges (IEs) with Visiting Arts and we are developing a new offer - Artist/Practitioner Leadership Development Placements. Each placement offers a different focus – BME leadership development, international working, developing entrepreneurial skills, hosting capacity, development of leadership through practice but each has at its core the development of leadership competencies through proximity to an organisation or business and its leader/s.

The Cultural Leadership Programme has championed the idea that within the Cultural sector one size does not fit all and placements have the capacity to provide a bespoke leadership development opportunity for host and placement. When placements work well - preparation combined with serendipity is at play due diligence on the host, the candidate and the project is not enough. Good organisations undergo significant changes, projects don't progress within the timescales, leaders leave organisations. CLP has run a critical mass of placements and perhaps now is the moment to reflect on some of the things we have learnt from our placements.

Placements are not extended masterclasses. Working within an organisation means that the person on placement sees the organisation or business from the inside – 'warts and all'. Some of our Peach placements have faced significant challenges but some have told us that they have learnt as much from the difficulties within organisations as they have from the shining examples of leadership. Sometimes a leader or organisation's failures are instructive and the responses of the person undertaking the placement to those failures are also illustrative of an ability to lead. Seeing the failure as an opportunity to learn, to observe, to reflect and build on the experience for their leadership journey. Understanding that some of the leadership learning comes from the negotiation of the challenges in setting up a placement – whether that's arriving and finding that

your desk isn't ready for you, navigating the complexities of moving temporarily to another country and culture, working through an approach to a project which has shifted from the one you signed up for or gaining the trust and understanding of a leader, board and team.

After spending a lot of time with each of our Peach placements we building an understanding of the complexity of managing expectations, to marry up the aspirations of host and person undertaking the placement with the reality of running complex organisations in the 21st century. Our organisations and businesses are not all perfectly led in all situations but the key insight is around the creativity of the response and the ability to deliver innovative ideas, processes, products and learning. Each individual needs to calibrate their experience and understand where their key learning lies. How can they augment their skills, develop their behaviours, build contacts and networks, make the shift to take them from shadowing into delivering, from learning to lead into leading?

Mentoring and coaching have a key role in maximising the placement. Feedback from the first Peach placements tells us that more is required than the support of a host and CLP so we are giving more layers of guidance. Each placement will have a mentor and we plan to build in greater earlier support from peers through a cohort of placements, advertised, inducted and undertaking placements at the same time.

In order to undertake a placement the individual has usually had to make the decision to give something up – usually a job and to make a significant commitment to invest in their future learning. Most placements last three to six months and usually before the halfway point they are starting to think about the exit from the placement – what is their next step? This needs to be in their thinking from the beginning without distracting from the placement itself – a hard line to walk but perhaps an internal negotiation that we all need to give time to.

Each placement is a risk - on the part of CLP – a significant investment of CLP time and funding in an individual; for the host – an investment of leadership time and opening up an organisation at a senior level and for the leader on placement – a challenge to their nascent leadership abilities. The early feedback is that these are risks worth taking – we hope to see the leaders we have invested in taking on significant roles across the sector, equipped with the unique leadership confidence, knowledge and understanding of their time in our cultural organisations.