



cultural  
leadership  
programme

**Cultural Leadership  
in Action**

ten case studies

Kim Evans

**Leadership Works**  
Excellence in Leadership

## **Cultural Leadership in Action: ten case studies**

### **Kim Evans**

The Cultural Leadership Programme was launched in 2005 to help ensure that the UK has a vibrant and sustainable creative and cultural sector that enhances our quality of life and contributes to the economy. Over the past five years, it has had a transformational affect on the sector and its attitude to leadership development. Each year over 7,000 people have participated in its programmes and as a result, we now have a sector that is more knowledgeable, more networked and more confident. It is also taking more responsibility for leadership development.

One of the great strengths of the Cultural Leadership Programme has been its person-centred approach. It recognises that everyone who engages with the Programme has her or his own development needs and brings an individual perspective to the process. Many of those it has worked with had already embarked on a leadership journey. For some participants, engaging with the Programmes was part of a steady progression in their professional development. In some cases, the training provided a transformational moment – the step that took a participant from good to great. Others valued the space for reflection that the Programme offered. Some very experienced leaders had previously found very few opportunities in their career for personal development. It has also supported individuals and organisations to develop new networks and development programmes and a number of these are now self-sustaining.

The following case studies have been chosen to demonstrate the different ways in which the Cultural Leadership Programme has contributed to the development of talented individuals in the creative and cultural sector and to show how those individuals are building on their engagement with the Programme to develop their careers and contribute to the future success and creativity of the sector.

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## **Harpreet Kaur: on the road**

**Harpreet Kaur** is a creative producer and arts project manager. She also has experience in marketing and audience development. She has always had a strong interest in international arts and wanted to develop her skills by working in a completely different cultural and social context.

Since she finished her Powerbrokers International Leadership Placement in Beijing, she has taken a twelve-month sabbatical, visiting South America, South East Asia and her motherland, India. She is now living in Melbourne, Australia and is working at Regional Arts Victoria. Her ambition is to create projects that build bridges between different cultures, and find innovative solutions to current global social, economic and environmental issues.

The placement in Beijing was a life-changing experience for me. I am a lot more confident now. My journey is not going to be a linear one. Maybe it will take me longer but it will be all the better for that.

Harpreet describes herself as a self-starter and someone who is always looking for development opportunities. She recognises that the cultural sector doesn't necessarily provide a career development path or recognise the fact that a lot of creative practitioners and managers want to change direction as they develop. 'Somehow,' she says, 'the expectation is that you will just keep on moving up in a straight line. In my case in my case, perhaps I should have gone from Marketing Assistant to Marketing Manager to Director. That is what is often expected but I realised that is not what I wanted to do.'

Harpreet had always wanted to work internationally but when she saw the advertisement for the Cultural Leadership Programme's Powerbrokers International Leadership Placement with the Beijing Modern Dance Company, it wasn't the fact that it was in Beijing that made her apply. It was the fact that it was a producer post. China was just a bonus.

I'd done a lot in the arts, but I never felt comfortable calling myself a producer. When people asked what I did, I said an arts manager. Maureen Salmon of Freshwaters Consultancy, who led the placement programme, started calling me a producer. Even now, I feel I don't quite have the right to use that title. But other people, particularly here in Australia where I am now based, see I have those abilities and that's what they see me doing in the future.

The international placement made Harpreet focus on the journey she wanted to go on. The pre-placement work confirmed her instinct that she was good with people but she hadn't realised quite how important her networking skills were and where that might lead her professionally.

I'm good at winning others over and that is what producers have to do all the time. I think those strengths have come out in me more since the placement and I'm using them more strategically.

She arrived in Beijing in November 2008 and spent five months there. It was a period of tremendous highs and lows. She hadn't anticipated the challenge of being in a country where she couldn't speak the language. 'I'm Networking Queen and suddenly I couldn't communicate. I felt terribly isolated to begin with. For me the placement at the Beijing Modern Dance Company was a very big deal. But to many of the staff, I was just someone coming in for a few months and going away again. It took a long while to build trust and get them to share ideas, even to share documents that weren't in Chinese!'

At one point during the placement things reached a crisis point for Harpreet. She called her mentor, Zhang Changcheng, the company's director. He came over straight away and gave her some helpful but tough advice. He helped her see things from the Chinese perspective, explaining that she wasn't communicating well.

He told me that I was being too British and too nice. I was angry at first but later I realised that I probably am too nice in the way I come across. Of course you should be polite but you also need to be very clear and show you know what you want and what you expect. This also made me reflect on my career so far. I had started by being very determined and focussed, but I had become a bit lost and confused. The placement helped me regain my clarity and focus.

I came out of it stronger and more confident and with new skills. It was a great introduction to international working. I have more understanding of international touring and festivals and my association with one of China's leading arts organisations has raised my profile and will stand me in good stead in brokering new international partnerships. Beijing Modern Dance Company is keen to continue the relationship with me.

Harpreet says that she learned not only more about herself but also about another culture, another perspective, and about arts management practice that was very different to the one she knew in the West.

I saw with my own eyes how art comes to life without any government funds and support, and how passion, commitment, hard work and good leadership create change and shifts in society, government and politics. I have started to free myself of self-doubt and have built my confidence and outlook on my life and work, understanding my needs and leadership style.

Towards the end of her placement, a friend gave Harpreet a notebook and said she should write down her thoughts and aspirations. She wrote, 'I am going to travel the world for a year and I am going to live and work in Melbourne'. And that's what she did.

Taking the time to travel wasn't a decision she took lightly. She describes the pressure to 'do the next thing', the MA in Arts Management, the big job. But that's not what she wanted. This was the moment to develop her own ideas and creativity. Her priority was to focus on intercultural work and she saw that she could connect that with her own cultural journey and go to India for the first time. She is clear that the Cultural Leadership Programme placement was the springboard that enabled her to take that step.

Harpreet began her sabbatical year in South America looking at how different cultures had survived and changed through patterns of migration. She then spent four months in India, going to the Punjab where her parents were born and grew up before moving on to Australia. She had visited Melbourne in 2003 and found it an inspiring and creative city. Since arriving back there in August 2010, she has used her new skills to make things happen for her. She is a programme officer at Regional Arts Victoria, working on their regional and national touring programme, Arts Across Victoria. She volunteers with Kultour a multicultural touring agency. She is also associated with Asia Link at Melbourne University on a programme that sends 40 arts managers to Asia on placements exploring a South Asian Arts festival in 2012, as well as building relationships with arts organisations, festivals and multicultural artists. She is looking forward to using her language skills at WOMADelaide this year as an interpreter for Indian artists at the international music and dance festival, and supporting the professional development of Monica Singh, an Odissi dancer from India who recently arrived in Delhi.

Looking back over at her own international placement she says,

When I got on that plane to Beijing in 2008 I didn't know that I would be spending most of the next two years travelling and working internationally. The downside of leadership programmes is that they create an expectation; people want speedy outcomes and instant results. But everyone's journey is different. I know that my investment in myself will pay back when the time is right.

The Cultural Leadership Programme placement gave me the opportunity to realise that it was OK professionally to build my own skills and my own leadership trajectory. It enabled me to get off the dance floor and see the view from the balcony.

I'm a lot more confident now. Here in Australia, I feel things coming together. I'm developing a five-year strategy. When I was first in Melbourne in 2003 there were hardly any Indians living in the city. Now there are many. This is like my Dad's experience of coming to Britain from the Punjab a generation ago. I'm really interested in the second-generation experience. How do we look at what is happening here now in terms of identity and migration? I want to deliver some innovative international projects that explore this, and more, in a lively and

surprising way. I think I could really be a key player here – or indeed anywhere in the world - championing diversity and change.

## **Rhian Hutchings: leading from within**

**Rhian Hutchings** is the director of WNO MAX at Welsh National Opera. She is also a producer and director who is passionate about commissioning contemporary opera. She has been a head of department at WNO for over two years and is a member of the senior management team. She describes her role as maximising the resources of WNO and connecting the company to the community. She also challenges herself and the company to explore what opera is and can be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Rhian signed up for the Cultural Leadership Programme's Leadership Unleashed programme to give herself the time and space to consider these challenges. She's been able use the skills and techniques she learned back at WNO.

I was encouraged to bring my learning back to the Senior Management Team. I've used techniques to engage more people in our team discussions and we've tackled some difficult issues together. I feel that I am braver now and more confident within my own organisation and I'm developing new partnerships that I really hope will make a difference to the sector as a whole.

Rhian is an experienced opera producer and director who in the last few years has become a senior manager. She has a very supportive line manager in Peter Bellingham, Managing Director at WNO. However, until recently she'd had little formal leadership training. That does not surprise her. In her view, training doesn't filter down to artists and producers. She was pleased to see the Cultural Leadership Programme beginning to address the gap through its programmes that are aimed specifically at that part of the sector.

She sees parallels between her role as a manager and her work as producer and director.

Working with a team and line managing people, is similar to the way I work in the rehearsal room. I'm used to managing creative processes, working to a timetable and delivering outcomes. I have spent the last two years in my post of head of department feeling my way as a leader. I guess I rely on my instincts a great deal and do my best to empower my team and give them the confidence and knowledge they need to make things happen.

One of the challenges she faced was that her department (WNO MAX) had a mission to hand creativity over to the participants it worked with, which is very different from the mission of the rest of the organisation. Rhian wanted to erode those boundaries and introduce opportunities for discussion at the Senior Management Team about how the company as a whole could become more open.

Rhian wanted to find some new tools to help her develop her leadership role within the company and reflect on her own practice as a leader. Earlier in her career at WNO, she

had done a short, emerging managers' course in London. It had been useful but after five days it was over and she was on her own again. She then looked at the Clore Leadership Short Courses but, as the mother of a small child and with a very busy schedule at WNO, she wasn't able to take two weeks out.

The Cultural Leadership Programme recognises the challenge that emerging and mid-career leaders often face in 'managing up' and it supports flexible programmes that provide the resources and reflective space to address the issue. Rhian applied for Leadership Unleashed, a leadership development opportunity that challenges conventional thinking, stimulates new ideas and builds powerful networks that stretch well beyond the cultural sector. It's spread over nine months but is a modular programme that requires participants to take a limited number of full days out of their schedule. They work together in small groups to seek out best practice, share ideas and create new models of working that will address the core leadership needs of artists, entrepreneurs and business people.

Leadership Unleashed builds on four key leadership themes: curiosity, passion, insight and courage. Using these four principles, participants work together in varied groups to benchmark their current practice, investigate how a re-evaluation of these ideas could impact upon their leadership and implement new strategies for leading change. Rhian found the course valuable. 'The main thing it gave me was time to reflect. My work life and home life are complex and busy. I have made my way to my current position through my passion and being in the right place at the right time. Now is the time for me to take control of where I am heading in life.' During the programme she decided that she needed to be more courageous in WNO's Senior Management Team meetings and start asking the questions that really mattered.

She found spending time with people from other sectors, particularly the business sector, illuminating. She used some of the business techniques that were shared to help her in her own business planning at WNO. She has also introduced some of the techniques from the programme to the Senior Management team, with the encouragement of her line manager. This is already creating more room for debate. Rhian has been brave enough to ask some difficult questions about the future of opera and was delighted to find that her peers on the team responded positively to the challenge. She was particularly keen to ensure that more voices were heard in the team's discussions and she successfully used the brainstorming technique from the programme's curiosity session to encourage this.

Rhian feels that her leadership journey has now begun in earnest. She has kept in touch with the coach on Leadership Unleashed and plans to set up some one-to-one sessions with her in the future. She is putting together a submission to become a Pathfinder Consortium as part of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Arts Work Scheme.

I realise now that I have a responsibility to do more and to deliver partnerships that will make a difference. The Arts Work Scheme is there to fund a small

number of collaborative pathfinder partnerships to develop innovative proposals addressing the training and continuous professional development needs of artists working in participatory settings.

In the future Rhian wants to be an artistic director and head up an organisation. For now, she is enjoying the debate and collaboration she is helping to shape within WNO and its partners. She feels that the opportunity to reflect on her style as a leader and issues she faces has fed back into her artistic process and the creative management structure that she uses for her projects at WNO MAX.

## **Tony Heaton: joining the national network**

**Tony Heaton** became the Chief Executive of Shape, a national disability-led arts organisation based in London in 2008. When he moved to London to take up his new post, he decided he wanted to take advantage of some of the opportunities the Cultural Leadership Programme was offering. Tony had played a leadership role in the arts and voluntary sectors in the North West and in Dorset where he'd led the creation of a disability arts centre. Now he's in a role where he can influence at a national level.

The work he is doing with the Cultural Leadership Programme is connecting him to a group of national peers and networks.

It's helping me deliver the vision for Shape and initiate ambitious collaborations and new opportunities for disabled artists and arts practitioners across the country. It's also helping me make sure that I keep some space for reflection and my own creative work as a sculptor.

Tony Heaton has a row of fossils on the windowsill of his office and an almost transparent sculpture in Carrara marble that he made for a man who is losing his sight. Next to the sculpture are some shards of white stone, to remind him of his role as artist and the commission in his studio waiting to be finished.

He sees connections between his leadership role and artistic practice. 'It's the same process of generating ideas and putting ideas into practice. Artists can see things in a different way and creative thinking is vital for developing organisations.' Both as a leader and an artist, he values collaboration. He believes that his ability to build creative alliances will serve him well at Shape, working with mainstream organisations to get the best possible deal for disabled artists and audiences.

When Tony was appointed CEO of Shape in 2008, he knew he would need to build new national networks and alliances. 'I'd spent 10 years in Dorset. It was lovely but it was a bit white and a bit green. I wanted the challenge of living and working in London. But I didn't know many people here.'

The first thing he did was a Clore Leadership Short Course. It was an intensive residential two weeks. At the end, each participant had to write a postcard to themselves, saying what they were going to do. Three months later the organisers sent it to them as a reminder. Tony still carries his battered postcard with him and he's acting on the priorities he wrote on it.

Tony enjoys playing the role of a maverick. He says he likes 'seat of the pants leadership'. But when pushed, he is happy to admit that he is engaged by leadership theory. 'I'm curious about leadership. It's like a great book that I didn't understand at the time. Now I am doing the job, I do understand it. It's like maps. They don't mean very much until you get to the area where you need them.'

Each stage of the leadership journey presents new challenges and opportunities. The Cultural Leadership Programme recognises the importance of connecting people to new and relevant networks. These become particularly important when a leader takes on their first Chief Executive role. It runs a number of programmes that have proved valuable for those taking on new roles and a series of one-off events under the banner title Beyond the CEO has brought together new and experienced CEOs for debate and informal discussion.

When Tony arrived in London, he was invited to these events. The first one he went to was Polly Toynbee's session on The Leader and Society. The discussion was useful in its own right and for a natural entrepreneur like Tony, it was a valuable networking event, connecting him to a new group of national peers. He was just about to install an exhibition of portraits in Shape's new headquarters. Spotting Sandy Nairne, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, at the event, he cornered him – 'it's hard to walk round a guy in a wheelchair' – and persuaded him to come and open the exhibition.

Tony's belief that artists have transferable skills was reinforced when he heard the artist Grayson Perry speak at a Clore Leadership Programme seminar. 'That was a quality discussion. It reminded me that artists don't get hung up about making mistakes; they use them. That's useful learning for leaders.'

He thinks that disabled people also have transferable leadership skills.

As a wheelchair user, I am used to seeing the look of surprise or disbelief when people realise I lead an organisation. Even though I have been doing this in one shape or form for 12 years. Many of the disabled people I know are creative, flexible and lateral problem solvers. Just getting around often requires real tenacity.

Tony is currently taking part in Leading Through Change, the national leadership network for leaders of arts organisations that focus on disability. The nine-month project is supported by the Cultural Leadership Programme. It focuses on creating the conditions for sustainability and sector growth by developing transferable tools and processes; good communications and shared learning. It is also developing a strong evidence base for the organisations' work. The network is tackling a number of leadership challenges through action research, shared learning and dissemination. This approach involves three key areas: participation, partnership and promotion.

Tony was attracted by the proactive approach the programme was taking. 'We've got to open up the arts to disabled people, we've got to create more opportunities, and we've got to convince the mainstream to take more risks.' Ambition, collaboration and concern with accessibility are at the heart of his vision for Shape. He wants to ensure that disabled people are fully involved in the arts at all levels, from audience

participation, working as artists, being on the boards of organisations, through to working in cultural industries.

Tony is keen that there isn't a ghetto for disabled leaders. So he is also taking part in a more general leadership programme, Leadership Advance. This is a bespoke programme designed and run for the Cultural Leadership Programme by Lola Young and Nima Poovaya-Smith. It provides space for intellectual debate as well as explorations of how this translates into active practice. The participants meet for individual and group sessions and workshops, with international residencies, shadowing and mentoring programmes as additional options. Tony has particularly benefited from the emphasis on taking short periods of time out with peers.

The programme has strengthened Tony's belief that a leader needs distance, the opportunity to take time away from the minutiae of running an organisation in order to build a clear vision of where they want their organisation to be.

I'm really learning and developing as a leader now. I want to stay in the disability sector. I love helping to create opportunities for disabled artists. Thirty years ago disabled artists couldn't get into colleges, never mind find studio space that worked for them. Now we've got a disabled artist into Camden Arts Centre, Spike Island, Bluecoat in Liverpool, and now Baltic in Gateshead. My job is to get Shape and the artists it supports into the very best place. You can't stand still as a leader.

## **Delia Barker: moving on, moving up**

**Delia Barker** is one of the associates who used the opportunity offered by the Powerbrokers International Leadership Placement to make a step change in her career. Delia has 20 years experience in the cultural sector. Her specialism is dance. She has worked with artists, venues and partners in a wide range of cultural contexts. However, until recently she didn't think of herself as a leader.

When she applied for the Cultural Leadership Programme placement in Barbados in 2009, she was a Senior Dance Officer at Arts Council England. The placement was testing but she came back knowing that she could hold her own as a leader. 'It taught me to stop being mid-career and recognise that I was there now.' A few months after her return to the UK, Delia became one of the Cultural Leadership Programme's 50 Women to Watch. She is now Co-Director of the English National Ballet School.

Delia knew she was a strong communicator with good people skills. She had built up extensive experience of the dance and broader cultural sectors. Early in her career she had been awarded an Arts Council training bursary. After that, it had largely been learning on the job. She had found it relatively easy to exercise leadership in the smaller organisations she had worked in. She felt that her cultural background - her parents are from the West Indies and she had a strong knowledge of black and contemporary dance - was a strength; and she had some positive female role models.

Midway in her career, Delia moved to Arts Council England, working first in the national office and then as Senior Officer for Dance in London. This was a more visible position in which she was in an influential role, assessing grant applications and informing policy. In a sector where there are still pockets of professional male power, Delia sometimes found her position as a black female, a less comfortable one. It was also difficult to rebrand herself in an organisation where she had moved from a junior to more senior role. By 2007, she had concluded that, 'I'm a foot soldier and a pretty good one. And that is where I will probably stay.'

Others, however, saw her leadership potential. Sarah Weir, then Executive Director of Arts Council London, encouraged Delia to apply for a Clore Leadership Short Course.

It blew my mind and put me in a network of peers I didn't know I belonged to. I realised that 99% of my fears were shared by other people.

Although she now thought that she might have leadership potential, Delia didn't yet have the tools to fully realise it. She applied for the Cultural Leadership Programme's Powerbroker International Leadership Placement in order to 'test my boundaries and find the potential in myself'. The placements are three-month international residencies aimed at mid-career leaders from black Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds. One of them was in Barbados, at the Errol Barrow Centre for the Creative Imagination (EBCCI), part of the University of the West Indies, in Barbados. The task would be to work with

the Director, to create a five-year cultural policy for the island. It was the focus on governance and policy that attracted Delia. These were the areas in which she felt less confident. 'I felt I had to prove to people that I had the policy as well as the people skills.'

The placement came with a budget to cover expenses and additional leadership resources such as post-programme coaching. There was also practical and pastoral support before and during the placement, from Maureen Salmon of Freshwaters Consultancy. The support around a placement is a key element of the Cultural Leadership Programme's investment. In the sessions before she left for Barbados, Delia had confirmation that her strengths were people skills and influencing. She was now to put these to the test in a new environment, outside her comfort zone, working in the area of policy development.

Just a few days before she set off for Barbados, Delia made a critical decision about her future. She decided not to apply for a more senior position at the Arts Council and instead she said she would be resigning from her job in March 2010. She describes taking this decision as a 'massive risk' but one that she felt instinctively was right.

Within four days of arriving in Barbados, Delia knew that a cultural policy could not be achieved within 12 weeks. Her experience told her that EBCCI needed to win the confidence of the broader cultural sector and this would require extensive consultation. Her strategy was to persuade her colleagues that her placement would be better spent developing a cultural strategy that would sit comfortably alongside Barbados' existing strategy for citizenship. After ten days of discussion, she had achieved this.

She quickly recognised that her focus of influence needed to be the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Community Development. She successfully established a relationship with staff at the Ministry and met the Minister for Culture. Just before Delia left Barbados, the Permanent Secretary agreed to her proposals for the cultural strategy consultations.

One of the aims of the international placements is to enable the associates to network and build a legacy of relationships with artists, governments, cultural agencies, business and cultural industries leaders. Looking back, Delia says she felt that she achieved this. In particular, the placement taught her about influence and power and the importance of recognising the context in which you are operating. On a small island, where you are never more than two steps away from the Prime Minister, Delia was able to identify her circle of influence and use it.

Within the University, her challenge was a different one. She was considered unusual because she didn't have an MA or come from an academic background. Her task was to win the confidence of the Director and her colleagues. She also wanted to influence their thinking on cultural policy. In retrospect, Delia thinks that the task to develop a cultural policy within three months was unrealistic. However, she takes pride in her

quick assessment and reconfiguration of the situation. She describes her legacy as influencing the focus of the University. She enabled them to ask new questions about the impact of culture and education and to look at the links between culture and tourism, stretching and enhancing their thinking about cultural policy in the process.

Delia arrived back in the UK on the 31 December 2009, knowing that within three months, she would be unemployed for the first time in her life. But she came back with a new confidence, knowing that she could hold her own as a leader. This was reinforced by the post-placement coaching sessions for which she had set aside part of her budget.

Her leadership abilities were given further endorsement when, in March 2010, she was selected as one of 50 Women to Watch. This initiative from the Cultural Leadership Programme, designed to coincide with International Women's Day, was an opportunity to celebrate emerging to mid-career leaders who had already made a noticeable impact within the sector and are rising ever higher – a kind of Who's Who of Who's Next. For Delia it was an affirmation that others saw her leadership potential and it provided her with an address book that included senior leaders in the sector, in government and in the media.

Just before leaving the Arts Council, Delia came into contact with the English National Ballet School. The organisation was looking for a new CEO and Delia and a colleague recognised that between them they had the skill set that was required. They approached the Chair who encouraged them to put in a joint application. They have been joint co-directors since May 2010. The role is part-time and Delia has built a portfolio of work around it that includes music organisations, businesses development and mentoring some emerging leaders.

Delia looks back over her leadership journey saying:

I hadn't set out to work part-time or in ballet but it has turned out to be the right thing for me. My bravery in not taking the obvious route is down to the groundwork I did with the Cultural Leadership Programme before going to Barbados. If I hadn't done that placement, I wouldn't have had the courage to step out and up. The time and space away took me out of my comfort zone. It confirmed my existing skills and helped me identify and develop new ones.

## **Julie Freeman: the artist as influencer**

**Julie Freeman** is an artist who uses technology to explore and discover rhythms and patterns in predictable and unpredictable systems through audio, space and visualisation. Linking art, nature, science and technology, she experiments in transforming complex processes into sound compositions, objects and animations. Her focus is on translating nature to enable deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.

Julie also has a strong interest in business and strategy development and feels passionately that artists should have an influence on policy and decision making in the cultural sector. For her, signing up for a leadership development programme was about bringing together her business and artistic skills and strengthening her ability to influence. 'I feel my progress as an artist is more purposeful now and in turn that has made me better able to explain my work and influence people.'

When Julie arrived at the first session of the Cultural Leadership Programme's Method pilot programme in 2009, she sensed that many of the artists and practitioners were slightly embarrassed to be there.

The concept of the artist as leader was an ego thing that most of us had to struggle through at the beginning. People think leadership is about getting people to follow you. But actually it is about facilitating, making things and thoughts happen. As an artist you want to make work and then have other people interpret it in their own way. Creating the space for interpretation seems almost diametrically opposed to the traditional concept of leadership.

Julie describes the concept of leadership as 'slippery'. It's a word that she understands well. She has done a lot of work with fish and used technology to enable them to make music. She understands why a shoal of fish will suddenly change direction. They do not have a single leader at the front. Rather, the fish pick up information through a lateral line and change direction based on secondary information – you could call it a more subtle form of influence.

Alongside her involvement in creative experiment, Julie has a strong interest in building businesses and business models, something she inherited from her parents. She started her own business, Studio Fish, early in her career. It was her interest in business that first led her to identify the Cultural Leadership Programme as a potential resource, although she was surprised that they hadn't developed programmes aimed at artists earlier. 'Without artists, there wouldn't be a cultural sector to lead!'

She decided that the Method programme was likely to offer her the opportunity to develop and hone some hard practical skills and also provide a space to reflect on her creative practice. She also wanted to build her confidence.

I knew my interest in the business side of art was a strength but it also worried me. My parents swayed me to do technical drawing instead of fine art and I still worried that I hadn't got the history of art side covered. I didn't really study art properly until my MA. And my career is an unusual mix of art and technical and financial experience; I spent 18 months working at PwC Consulting before my NESTA fellowship. Even after 14 years, I was still struggling with the concept of calling myself an artist.

She found that just being selected for the programme gave her additional gravitas and helped build her confidence. She was relieved to discover this was true for many of the artists on the programme with her.

It was great to be able to share anxieties and problems with other creative practitioners. It was helpful to realise that, although we were all quite ambitious, we were all struggling with similar things. We all felt that our careers were fragile.

However, Julie knew that she thrived when she was in a position of responsibility and she recognised that a number of her skills as an artist were transferable to a leadership model. Her art requires a great deal of negotiating and partnership building. She initiates projects, builds a team to deliver them, leads the team and ensures that the project is completed successfully.

She takes quite a tough view on leadership and doesn't subscribe to the view that 'we can all be leaders now'. She believes that there is such a thing as a natural leader and although you can learn certain skills and these will be helpful, if you don't have what it takes you won't be able to influence.

It is a challenge for any artist to take unpaid days out of their creative practice – a challenge that many simply cannot afford. However, Julie felt that, although it is a high-cost model the Method programme provided a good return. 'We invested our time and they invested in us.'

Each participant had a coach, a critical friend, and a mentor. Julie chose someone from Goldsmith's as her mentor as she wanted to build her academic and writing skills. She found the sessions with her mentor particularly helpful and remains in touch with her. She used the time with her coach to reflect and test the alignment of her artistic and business skills, focusing on these as a positive strength. She has also remained in touch with the 'critical friend' provided by the programme.

Looking back at her time on the Method programme she says,

it has given me a legitimate reason to question and evaluate my position, and permission to ask others for advice and consultation about my practice and my ideas. Through peers, the mentor, the coach, critical friend, external help (past

mentors, colleagues, friends) and my own endeavours I have moved forward with my plans in a thoughtful way rather than an impetuous one. This shift from running to walking (with occasional sprints) has left me with an overall sense that my progress is more purposeful, which in turn has equipped me with a better way to understand and explain what I am doing.

Julie feels that she is now more confident in her influencing skills and is increasingly invited to take part in events and debates, such as a recent meeting of the BioCentre symposium in the House of Lords. They are keen for her to show her work at a future session on nanotechnology. She is also continuing to work with the Cultural Leadership Programme and was part of the delivery partner selection panel for its next artist/practitioner programme.

The Method programme has given me time to reflect and act on my personal and professional development; a new network of peers; increased clarity in regard to my art practice in a greater context; tools for productivity; an increased confidence in my ability to assess opportunities and move forward; and a renewed sense of value for my work and ideas. I feel like one of many who started a journey some time ago, and have now arrived at a turning point. I feel I now have some tools to help me converge the two paths that I've been on over the last 15 years or so.

## **Virginia Tandy: giving back**

**Virginia Tandy OBE** is Director of Culture for Manchester City Council. She has a wealth of experience in cultural development in the North West of England and more widely. She has worked in local authorities, the charitable sector and in the North West office of the Arts Council. As Director of Manchester City Galleries, she oversaw a major expansion and refurbishment of Manchester Art Gallery. Her non-executive roles include being a Trustee of the Heritage Lottery Fund and a member of the Cultural Leadership Programme's Advisory Board.

Like many senior figures in the creative and cultural sector, Virginia had limited access to leadership training in the early and mid-stages of her career and had to make her own development opportunities. 'I didn't have any role models that I could identify with and there were very few networks where I could find people like me.' She was determined to help ensure that the next generation had more opportunities and that there were support networks for those already in senior positions. With support from the Cultural Leadership Programme, she headed a national network for women leaders in museums. Over three years, the network has had a significant impact and is now self-sustaining.

Virginia began her career as a museums officer in a local authority. When she was 26 she went on a Council management course and thought, 'this is interesting, you can take responsibility for your own development'. She's done that pretty much ever since. Like many women of her generation she's had to create her own development opportunities.

She was progressing through the museums and galleries sector when the attraction of looking at the bigger picture and influencing arts policy took her to the Arts Council where she became Head of Visual Arts in its North West office. It was there she did the Open University's Effective Managers' course. 'I thought it would give me loads of answers. But no, it taught me to spot problems and find solutions.'

Like many women, she was juggling a complicated job and bringing up a child. Having a husband who was an artist was hugely important as it gave her more flexibility. She says that this allowed her to be 'a bit reckless' about the jobs she's gone for. In 1994, she made an adventurous move when she took over as Director of Cornerhouse, Manchester's international centre for contemporary visual arts and film. The organisation was about to face some significant financial challenges. However, she succeeded in leading it through an exciting period of capital expansion and new partnerships. This gave her skills that stood her in good stead when she applied 'as a rank outsider' for the role of Director at Manchester City Art Galleries. She got the job and later moved on to become Director of Culture in Manchester City Council.

Virginia had not worked in local government since 1984. In the intervening years, she had been in a mainly female environment both in Cornerhouse and at the Arts Council. Now she had a Chief Officer's job and she was amazed at finding herself in such a male

environment – ‘and at how much football there was!’ Not long after joining Manchester City Council, she went on the Top Managers’ Programme, which focused on self-awareness and building a self-development plan. The course became one of the models for the Clore Leadership Programme.

It was good but I didn’t find many people like me on it. There were lots of Chief Fire Officers and Chief Executives of smaller authorities. I realised I needed to recognise the fact that I was different and find a way of influencing without frightening the horses. And I realised that if I was feeling like this, other women would be feeling like it too.

Virginia wanted to re-connect with the museums sector, so in 2004 she contacted, Diane Lees who at the time was running the Museum of Childhood in London (she is now Director General of the Imperial War Museum). Together they formed the Women Leaders in Museums Network. The network started with just six people. Eighteen months later, when the Cultural Leadership Programme was set up they were encouraged to apply for funding.

The support we got from the Cultural Leadership Programme in 2007 allowed us to get to 24 members and provide proper facilitation and support. For nine months we met every six weeks. It was very intensive. We tried to recruit every senior woman in each of the nationals and every female director of a hub museum of gallery. Nick Serota called us the coven of witches - he was joking, I hasten to add. But I thought, good, we’ve been noticed!

Some of the women who joined were less comfortable with the women-only aspect of the network, something that Virginia sees as a generational divide. But everyone who joined has stuck with the network. ‘It has been really fun and really powerful. It has forged new connections between the regional and national organisations. There is a real sense of camaraderie and support. The next step will be to get people to set up their own networks.’

The Women Leaders in Museums Network is now headed by Janet Vitmayer, Chief Executive of the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London. The aim of the group is to be an influential leadership network, which works within and beyond the cultural sector to develop and inspire organisations and women. The network’s three broad aims are advocacy, development and sustainability. It has staged one-day events and some residential sessions to provide time for reflection and evaluation.

Virginia is proud of the impact that the Women Leaders in Museums Network is having and of the commitment of its members and its current Chair, Janet Vitmayer, to ensure that it continues. She is particularly pleased to see there are now more female role models for women at the top of the museums and galleries sector: Diane Lees at the Imperial War Museum, Janice Murray at the National Army Museum and Kathleen Soriano at the Royal Academy, for example.

I am delighted and a bit envious when I see the development opportunities available to the current generation of emerging and mid-career leaders. I hope that continues.

I'm enjoying the benefits of leadership development now, rather late in my career. You don't stop learning how to do it. I've been to a lot of the Cultural Leadership Programme's Beyond the CEO events. There still aren't enough networks for senior leaders. We really need opportunities for refreshment, support in keeping a sense of ourselves and avoiding burn out. I'm doing a coaching course at the moment with other senior managers in the City Council to improve my skills. It's a way of giving something back but is also an opportunity to reflect on and develop my own practice.

## **Nick Starr: changing the model**

**Nick Starr** is Executive Director of the National Theatre. He is firmly committed to helping people find opportunities to develop their talent and is convinced that there needs to be a structured approach to career development in the performing arts. In 2006, he was instrumental in building a network of performing arts organisations to deliver a development programme - Step Change - for talented individuals in the early and mid stages of their careers.

The first year of Step Change was supported by the Cultural Leadership Programme. It is now run by the National Theatre, which co-funds it with the Royal Opera House, in partnership with Young Vic, Battersea Arts Centre and Nitro. 'We started with a five year plan,' says Nick, 'but this is about changing the culture and I'm convinced the programme needs to be ongoing. We've just recruited the fourth cohort of participants and already we can see the impact - not only on the individuals who have taken part but also on the host organisations.'

Nick Starr saw that there were not enough routes for good people in the performing arts to develop their careers and he wanted to do something about it. David Lan, director of the Young Vic and David Jubb at Battersea Arts Centre shared his concerns. The three of them, together with Nicola Thorold and Graham Devlin, began to develop ideas for a scheme that would get industry professionals to work together to provide emerging leaders in the performing arts with structured development opportunities. The ambition was to have a long-term impact on the composition of the senior management and artistic teams in the performing arts.

They saw the benefits working both ways. Artistic organisations have to engage with emergent talent and ideas if they are to stay at the top of their game; and young people need opportunities to progress at the early and mid-stages of their careers if they are not to stagnate and become disillusioned with the industry. There is also the danger that those working in smaller organisations are forced to remain generalists and don't get access to the specialised training that is built into the national companies. Those who do find progressions opportunities, often do so by being in the right place at the right time or knowing the right people. Freelancers are particularly disadvantaged. Such a haphazard approach to career development is not effective for the individual or the industry.

Underpinning the scheme was a shared commitment to diversity. Nick, David Lan and David Jubb were convinced that the performing arts were tending to overlook people from backgrounds that had not provided them with the confidence or networks to present and negotiate their career development; and similarly people in the early stages of their careers weren't getting experience in organisations of different scales and disciplines.

The initial proposals were developed into the Step Change programme. Deborah Bull at the Royal Opera House and Felix Cross at Nitro were instrumental in bringing their organisations on board to join the National Theatre, Young Vic and Battersea Arts Centre in delivering the scheme and there was also input from Dawn Walton, artistic director of Eclipse Theatre. In 2007 the consortium approached the Cultural Leadership Programme for support and this enabled them to run the programme for a year.

The aim was to give participants from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and cultures the opportunity to be taught by and work alongside senior figures in the performing arts. It would give those taking part the opportunity to take stock and plan the next stage of their career. We wanted the emphasis to be on personal as well as professional development, some of the learning would be in groups and there would also be a bespoke element.

Nick and his partners were adamant that the Step Change programme had to be run by the profession itself. The partners overcame their concern that they might lose some talented people and focused instead on the shared benefits for the profession. Nick describes the immediate benefit as 'an expanded address book' and new people coming through the doors of the National Theatre and the other host organisations.

The Step Change Administrators have played an important role in developing and maintaining the programme and expanding the range of placements. They have been recruited from the participants in the programme. Gemma Baxter, the current administrator, was a participant in the 2008/09 cohort. At that time she was an Education Officer at the Royal Opera House and desperate for more responsibility. She knew, however, that it would be a while before that became available. She applied to the programme with the support of her department's director and began a gradual transition into the next stage of her career. Her mentor, Abigail Pogson at the Spitalfields Festival, asked her searching questions about her future. She and her fellow participants then took part in a series of master classes looking at everything from fundraising to producing. She chose to do her secondment at ATC a small touring company, vastly different in scale to the Royal Opera House but able to provide her with the kind of hands on experience she was unlikely to get in her home organisation.

Some of the programme participants have literally made a step change in their careers, moving to new permanent jobs. David Roots, then in the Young Vic's marketing department, spent his placement with Shakespeare's Globe theatre, working as assistant producer on two outdoor touring shows. When he returned to Young Vic, he was able to use his experience working on two of their productions. He has now moved on to become General Manager at Fevered Sleep.

Katie Town was a participant in the inaugural Step Change programme. At the time she applied she was working in the Royal Opera House's Business Affairs team in the Licensing Department. The programme offered her the opportunity to work at the Young Vic on a part-time basis. She worked closely on a report analysing the

implications of international co-productions and also assisted the General Manager. When Katie left the programme she accepted the role of General Manager at Candoco Dance Company. Then in 2009 she joined the National Theatre's Discover Programme as General Manager.

The success and speed with which the Step Change programme has taken off, surprises even Nick Starr. Although the partner organisations will always put forward their own candidates, the programme is open to everyone, including freelance practitioners. By the third year, Step Change had 180 applicants for 15 places.

He thinks the Cultural Leadership Programme got a good return on its investment. The Step Change team was able to carry over part of the grant to help support the second year of the programme and it continues now thanks to ongoing investment from the National Theatre and Royal Opera House. The support from the very top of all the partner organisations has been vital to the programme's success and its sustainability.

Step Change started off as a five-year programme but Nick Starr thinks it should be run in perpetuity. 'This kind of initiative just won't happen through informal networking,' he says. 'It requires a dedicated administrator and careful development of partners and hosts. It's vital for the health and creativity of the profession and its played an important role in the National Theatre's leadership journey.'

## **Sue Williams: the non-conformist leader**

**Sue Williams** is an artist and senior policy maker. She works at Arts Council England where she is responsible for national policy on disability equality. She deliberately challenges the stereotype of a leader. She loves to take creative risks and is fully aware of the responsibility she has to help change the environment for disabled artists and participants but she refuses to take herself too seriously.

Sue is passionate about her job and decided to enrol on the Sync Intensive programme to ramp up her potential and challenge her thinking about leadership. 'I always thought of myself as a bit of a rebel. I've come to realise that is not incompatible with leadership. Good leaders are often non-conformists.'

Sue had worked in a disability arts organisation funded by Arts Council England. She never thought she would want to take on the role of arts policy maker herself. However, when she moved to the University of the Arts she realised that she could make change happen working in a mainstream organisation, particularly change around disability equality. She joined the Arts Council on a one-year fixed term contract, to work on its Creative People project. She is still there 8 ½ years later and is now responsible for the Arts Council's national policy on disability equality.

She likes the opportunity to create change and be creative but until recently she didn't think of herself as a leader, although she does lead on national policy. Until the Cultural Leadership Programme came along, she felt that the term leader was used in a very limited way, with the focus on an individual.

I didn't like the personalisation of leadership. For me it's about having a goal and achieving an impact. People are talking about leadership in a much more interesting way now. Of course, there is the danger that it just becomes another buzzword, that there is more emphasis on theory rather than actually doing it. But the aim of the Cultural Leadership Programme is to deliver some really practical outcomes.

Her reservations about leadership are not due to a lack of confidence on her part. She is a frequent public speaker in the UK and beyond. She is comfortable with the fact that the programmes she has written for the Arts Council have made her open to public scrutiny. In fact, that is something she positively enjoys. 'I don't mind that, I like to scare myself and take risks. Being exposed, doing something that will be public and have influence, that's a motivator for me.'

She does feel that, as a disabled person, she is under huge pressure at times to deliver for her sector.

I've dealt with that by coming to realise that it's not up to me to sort it all out. I have to create the conditions in which people can sort themselves out. I think

that although we are seeing a lot more disabled people in the arts and participating in the arts, it's slow progress. We give ourselves a hard time. I give myself a hard time as a disabled person. I don't feel that I am allowed to fail.

I do take my job very seriously. But I try hard not to take myself seriously. I don't believe that being professional and being a good leader is about being buttoned-up. When it comes to diversity people expect you to be a bit PC or frowny. Don't let them stereotype you. Be playful.

Sue believes that if you are in a job for quite a long time, you have to keep reinventing yourself and she has done that during her time at the Arts Council. As a disabled person, she is particularly keen to challenge people's expectations of her. 'Of course you have to be consistent, but create some inconsistency within the frame!'

That need for reinvention is part of the reason that she signed up for the Sync Intensive programme, part of the Cultural Leadership Programme's engagement with the disability sector. The title comes from the idea of syncopation, defined as 'the emphasis on a normally un-emphasised beat'. The programme provides opportunities for 15 individuals to work together in a series of development days, online networking and one-to-one coaching. Sue's cohort included managers in arts organisations, local authorities and museums, and filmmakers.

I went into Sync Intensive to understand my own leadership issues both inside and outside disability. I particularly wanted to be able to identify the issues and share experience with others. You have to look your own internal barriers and then at the barriers that other people put around you. I wanted to look at why I was reluctant to accept that I am in a leadership role.

She found the programme lived up to the intensive title. 'You were really thrown in. Very early on I had to write an article about myself and leadership for the website. I didn't think I had anything specific or new to say but I found that I did. The article wasn't the one I had expected to write. It made me feel vulnerable. I had challenged myself.'

Sue is very committed to her role at the Arts Council and combining that with her work as an artist. She didn't go on the Sync Intensives to get a new or bigger job. But she did want to ramp up within her existing role and create greater impact. She's learning how to do that within the limitations of a big bureaucracy. 'I don't find limitations a bad thing necessarily. You can use them creatively. As an artist I will sometimes say, I am only going to use black pens this week or I'm only going to work on paper that is 2 ½ centimetres square. That's a creative challenge.'

She also found that the coaching sessions on the Sync programme gave her permission to realign her work as an artist and her work as a funder. She now keeps an illustrated journal, an intriguing diary in pictures. At the front she has included a quote from George Eliot: 'It is never too late to be what you might have been.'

She'd like, in the longer term, to have a 70/30 split between working as a funder and as an artist. She emphasises the direct connection between how she works as an artist and as a leader in the cultural sector. They are both about making connections and creating something new; about challenging herself, other people, and perceptions.

It's important to scare yourself sometimes both as an artist and a policy leader. You have to take risks. For the first time I am using a journal (a sketchbook) with really beautiful paper. I am making myself work directly on the page in inks. No pencil. No rubbing out. All my mistakes are visible. That's scary, but it's good.

Sue went into the Sync programme feeling uncomfortable with being a leader.

I am confident and I am very driven but I am a bit of a rebel. I don't like to conform. It seemed to me that leadership was about conforming. But as I learn more about it, I can see that great leaders are often non-conformists, people who challenged the status quo. I've realised that I am more comfortable with being a leader than I thought!

## **James Whitmore: changing perspective**

**James Whitmore** is Managing Director of Postar, the industry body that produces audience estimates for advertising campaigns in public places. He has spent much of his career in the advertising industry and benefited from the training programmes it offers. He responded to an invitation to join the Cultural Leadership Programme's Advance Leadership in the Creative Industries pilot programme because he is an advocate for leadership development and saw it as an opportunity to refresh his thinking and share his own learning. He was stimulated by the different disciplines represented on the programme: 'It allowed the participants to concentrate on the big issues and get away from the detail of their individual sectors'.

James feels that the ALCI programme fills a gap for the creative industries.

Getting out of my own discipline and looking at leadership and talent management issues through the eyes of people working in other parts of the creative industries was enlightening and re-energising. It also reminded me of what I have to offer.

James took part in the pilot programme for Advanced Leadership in the Creative Industries (ALCI) in 2009. He has been a leader in the advertising industry for many years and decided to sign up in order to refresh his own thinking and give something back.

ALCI was set up by the Cultural Leadership Programme as part of its commitment to engage with senior executives across the creative industries. It involved leading industry bodies in developing and promoting the programme, including the IPA (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising). The IPA contacted James as one of the alumni of their own Seven Stages professional development programme.

James is very supportive of the Cultural Leadership Programme's remit to support and develop leaders across the creative and cultural sector. He'd benefitted from a number of training courses earlier in his career. He came into advertising relatively late, at the age of 28, after several years in the production department of a national newspaper group. He joined Young & Rubicam as a graduate trainee and swiftly rose up the ranks. After five years he was promoted to the board. He was appointed Media Director soon after and, in 1999, was made managing director of The Media Edge, a spin-off from the main agency. Following the purchase and merger with CIA to form Mediaedge:cia, James was made Managing Director of the new firm. He moved on, becoming Managing Director of Postar, at the end of 2005.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the advertising industry invested heavily in talent. The training I had was invaluable to me. When I started as a manager, I did things entirely intuitively. I knew I had potential but I had no framework. The IPA's Seven Stages Programme was devised to support career training needs from

entry point right through to managing director, with each stage designed to provide relevant learning throughout your career. It is partly delivered by current leading IPA agency practitioners who are committed to giving something back to the industry. That was an aspect of the ALCI programme that made me sign up – the opportunity to work with other people, share thinking and support each other's development.

Another aspect of ALCI that appealed to James was the fact that it brought together people from a wide range of disciplines and it was not metropolitan.

Advertising is very London orientated. I knew a couple of people on the programme but many were from outside London and from different parts of the sector – design, music and media. A number of the organisations were quite small; not all the participants were at the top of their companies. The fact that I was getting a lot of different perspectives was the key thing for me. We faced very similar challenges but had different perspectives on them. That was enlightening.

The ALCI programme was spread over three months and involved a couple of residential sessions at Ashridge business school who had developed the programme in partnership with the Cultural Leadership Programme. The sessions exposed the participants to the latest thinking on leadership, strategy, creativity at work and talent management, as well as drawing on the participants' own leadership experiences and expertise.

They got in some heavy hitters to talk to us – Greg Dyke, John Hegarty, Michael Peters, Roger Parry. Those speakers really demonstrated that there was not one type of leader and the participants responded differently to those individual styles of leadership. The debate was lively. The sessions hosted by leading creative industry organisations such as M&C Saatchi and Universal Music were also good opportunities for looking at how other sections of the creative industries work. We spent a day with each organisation and had to work through some of the business issues they were facing and present our solutions to the Executive Board at the end of the day.

If I have a criticism, it would be that we started with a great deal of leadership theory. We had all been in our businesses for a while and that is probably not the way that people with our level of experience are going to learn. Introducing a concept, then learning through doing and debating something is probably more productive.

The fact that much of the programme took place in a residential setting, away from the office environment was important for James in order to have time for proper reflection. He was surprised at how some participants found it hard to switch off - or rather switch off their phones. 'Here we were on a course about leadership and every now and then

someone would pop off to answer their mobile. One of the things that I've realised over the years is that things are not going to fall apart if you are away for a couple of days. In fact, the leader being away from the office is a great opportunity for others to take more responsibility.'

The programme focused on personal development as much as business theory and provided the opportunity for the delegates to share their individual leadership challenges. There were opportunities to give and receive honest feedback on their performance, something that it is quite hard to get when you reach a senior position.

It was a supportive and dynamic environment. That really was a key factor. It made me realise that it wasn't just advertising that was a stressful profession. Everyone has to deal with pressure, has to manage creative talent, and we were able to share our problems and our ways of solving them.

James says he came away from ALCI refreshed and re-energised. Like his fellow participants he is a senior executive in his field. He has benefited from the advertising industry's proactive approach to professional development but he knows that he needs – and wants – to keep on developing.

I think it is really important that the training doesn't stop when you become the leader of an organisation. I know there are things I still want to work on to develop my own leadership skills. I also know that there is a lot that I could give back. One of the things that the creative industries need to think about is how they develop and use the skills of people like me in the later stages of their career to support the next generation of leaders.

## **Mark Wright: the trainer's story**

**Mark Wright** is Director of People Create, a learning design company that specialises in blending creativity with commercial understanding. He has been working with the Cultural Leadership Programme since it started and the Programme's person-centred approach matches his own.

Mark has designed and facilitated a range of leadership opportunities for participants and his engagement with the Programme has been the catalyst for reflection on his own leadership skills.

On the leadership programmes I ask people to really look hard at what they've been doing and where they want to get to. That process has made me question my own way of doing things and develop my practice. As a facilitator, it has been a leadership journey for me as well.

Mark Wright specialises in developing innovative solutions around issues of leadership development, culture, performance and relationships. He draws on the expertise that he has developed through a career that has taken him from Arts & Business to Ernst & Young, where he was responsible for Leadership Development, Diversity and Inclusion, to setting up his own business, People Create Limited. His corporate clients include UBS Investment Bank, Allianz Insurance and Danone, while in the creative and cultural sector he has worked with the British Council, Arts Council England, Leeds Metropolitan University and Business to Arts in Ireland.

In 2007 the Cultural Leadership Programme asked him to design and deliver a new programme of Leadership Development Days that would provide a challenging and creative introduction to the concept of leadership.

That worked really well and I felt pretty confident about the way I was doing things. But then I was offered the opportunity to extend the programme, giving it a much broader remit and that's where my own learning really began.

The Cultural Leadership Programme asked Mark to prioritise the recruitment as many disabled people as possible into the new programme. Until then, he had consciously avoided targeted programmes, preferring instead to focus on individual journeys and felt that to do this effectively you needed a wide range of participants in the room. He saw his role as enabling people to cross the barriers that they, or other people, had constructed around themselves. Nevertheless, he took on the new challenge that the Programme presented, recognising that it would develop his experience in this area. As a result of that work he was approached by Jo Verrent and Sarah Pickthall. They run their own consultancies, specialising in disability equality. They invited him to join with them to tender to the Cultural Leadership Programme for a leadership development programme designed specifically for disabled people working in the cultural sector. This became known as Sync 100.

As Mark worked on the development of Sync 100 and, later, Sync 20, he realised that he wanted to reassess a great deal of his practice and approach to leadership development and started looking at through a new set of filters. He discovered that, in many ways, he was putting himself through the same process that he had asked many of his previous leadership participants to go through.

He says that the experience of working on the Sync programmes had a fundamental impact on all his work. It wasn't only relevant to programmes for those with disabilities but came down to accessible learning design. He also learned a huge amount from working with Jo and Sarah; saying 'their respective skills as facilitator and coach, introduced me to new and more accessible approaches to learning and I look forward to working with them in broader contexts.'

An interest in psychology underpins much of Mark's work in leadership development and he uses it to link together his work in the creative and business sectors. One of the sources he draws on is Joseph Campbell's 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' and the leadership journey through which ordinary people, working individually and collectively, respond to change, hardship and challenges, transforming themselves in the process.

Taking the idea of the Hero's Journey, he distils it down to the fundamental stages that a participant in a leadership programme goes through – understanding where they are now; identifying the transition they want to make; and then coming home with new skills, confidence and understanding. It is one of the processes that participants have found toughest and most rewarding. One participant taking part in a Leadership Development Day in Manchester said, 'the most useful part for me was the Hero's Journey. I have to say it was also the hardest. Taking a good hard look at the story of your life is scary, especially when it dawns on you that just blaming others is no longer an option'.

Mark is not keen on overloading leadership programmes with jargon and theory. 'I am interested in behaviours. Theory is not the same as behaviour. I want to make the process of personal development a creative and engaging one.'

When Mark and his team designed Leadership Unleashed, his most recent programme for the Cultural Leadership Programme, Mark wanted to challenge conventional thinking and stimulate new ideas, encouraging those who took part to look outside their own sector. He constructed a nine-month modular programme for 75 participants from the commercial and cultural sectors. They worked together in small groups looking at best practice, sharing ideas and creating new models of leadership working that would be applicable to artists, entrepreneurs and business people alike.

The programme was built around four key themes: curiosity, passion, insight and courage. Using these four principles, participants worked together in changing groups to look at their current way of doing things, consider how they could re-evaluate their ideas and implement new strategies for leading change. The workshops were creative,

demanding and action-based. He's continually impressed by the commitment that people bring to them.

One of the things about the creative and cultural sector is that it demands so much of people. They are giving all the time, to people, to organisations and to art itself. Often people arrive on a programme exhausted. They are not always clear why they are here or why they are doing what they are doing any more. What we try to do is give them space to put themselves at the centre of their journey, to look at their priorities; sometimes deciding what they need to do less of. You need to empty the jar a little before you can put more in.

He reflects on the amazing transformations that people taking part in the Cultural Leadership Programme have effected.

People have been really brave, changing jobs, taking on new projects, moving to new countries. Some people have been courageous enough to recognise that they can make an enormous contribution by staying in the same place. Sometimes, there really is 'no place like home.

I feel I have been on an incredible journey during the years I have been working within the Cultural Leadership Programme. I have set up my own business and worked with some amazing people – many of whom I am still in touch with. Most of all, I have taken the opportunity to question my own thinking. I've asked the people who have come on to the programmes to look at the way they have been doing things and map out their own heroic journey. I realise now that I have been on a similar journey too.



This essay was commissioned by the Cultural Leadership Programme and forms part of the CLP Evaluation 2011, Leadership Works. Leadership Works comprises a suite of essays and case studies that illustrate and bring to life the journey and key facets of the Cultural Leadership Programme from its inception in 2006 to the end of its second phase in 2011.

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