Vulnerability and Cultural Leadership

To what extent does vulnerability in cultural leadership create the conditions for resilience and collaboration in the cultural sector, particularly at times of uncertainty and change?

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Contents

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"If you are leading… you have self-selected to take on the responsibility and the risk, and you're giving yourself some capacity for good judgement. To take that on is by very definition to make yourself vulnerable."
Alison Tickell, CEO, Julie's Bicycle

Introduction

During my time at Julie's Bicycle working with hundreds of organisations and individuals to transition to a more environmentally sustainable cultural sector, three themes that I experienced as constants were change, collaboration and uncertainty. Working with people to grapple with the implications of the most existential threat of our time – climate change – through a process of practical actions, community building and data gathering that allowed us to track progress and celebrate achievements along the way, I became increasingly aware that one of the biggest challenges of empowering people to step into the role of "change-maker" was their relationship to uncertainty. Because change, especially in the context of an issue as complex as climate and environmental damage, means frequently stepping into the unknown and acknowledging that the ways in which we have been living and leading are no longer fit for the future. It means accepting that there is no clearly marked destination towards which we're travelling in our search for "better" and seeing that our individual experience and expertise isn't enough to equip us with the answers – that we need to work with others, sometimes with vastly different expertise and belief systems to our own, to pave a new way forward. In other words, it is a vulnerable place, and to go there calls on our capacity for courage, creativity, connection and psychological resilience.

I also saw these ideas reflected in the experience and insight of cultural leaders shared in many Chatham House conversations during my Clore Fellowship in relation to other change agendas too: digital innovation, diversity and equality, cultural education and institutional transformation. I became immersed in the question of what it is that builds our capacity for stepping into the uncertainty of leading transformative change. The search led me – amongst other things – to the vulnerability researcher, Brené Brown. Her work conclusively maps the ways in which vulnerability, typically defined as a weakness, is also the source of our most profound experiences and personal power. Love, connection, belonging, creativity, authenticity and courage – all of these are rooted in the uncomfortable exposure of vulnerability. And so it was that this research took shape. If we are seeking leadership that is resilient and collaborative in the face of change and uncertainty, what is our relationship to vulnerability, and does it have a place as a positive force in cultural leadership?

Executive Summary

This research looks at the role of vulnerability – defined as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure" in relation to resilience in cultural leadership. "Resilience" is defined as the ability to not only "bounce back" from adversity but also grow beyond our current capacity, and "cultural leadership" is defined as both the act of leading the cultural sector *and* influencing broader social cultures by challenging and transgressing norms, and creating meaning.

The greatest challenge identified by cultural leaders during this research was the pace of change, both in the world at large and within the sector. The combination of austerity, increasing social isolation, technological disruption, political uncertainty, the climate emergency and the migrant crisis, amongst other challenges, is creating a perfect storm of competing priorities and stretched capacity. The International Futures Forum has termed this a "Conceptual Emergency… in which the world we have created has outstripped our capacity to understand it" and, importantly, in which our individual agency to act is hampered by the psychological and emotional impacts of such far-reaching and complex change.

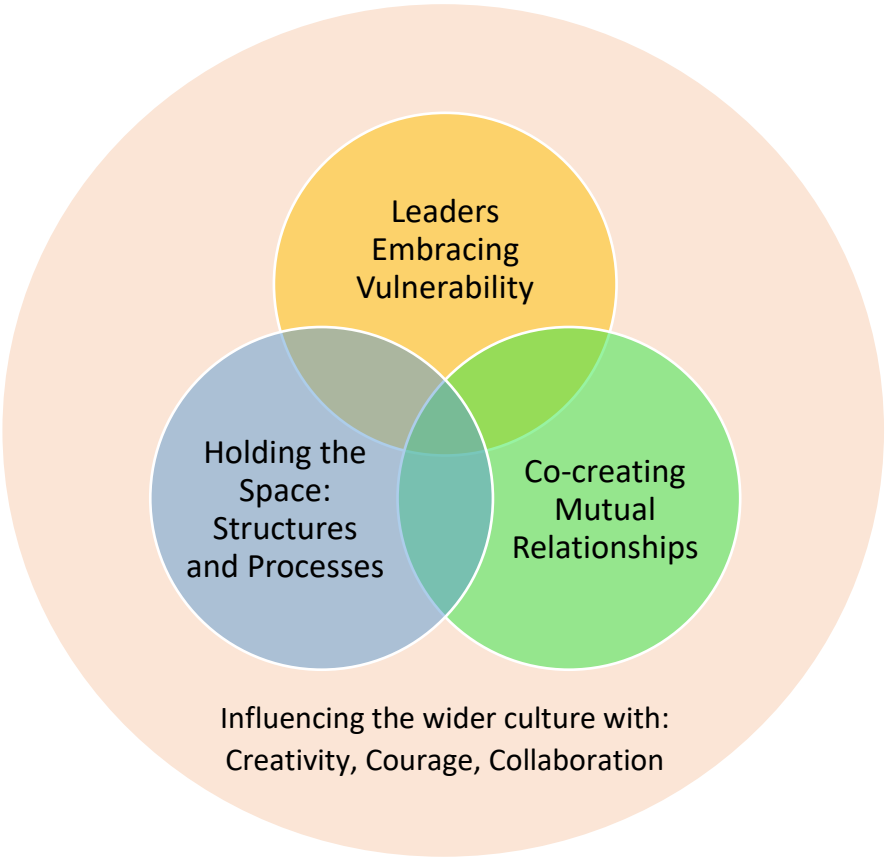
The "conceptual emergency" is manifesting in cultural sector-specific challenges like institutionalization, a growing adversity to risk, entrenched power and privilege, a lack of diversity, a lack of investment in personal and professional development, high instances of sexual harassment, anxiety rates ten times that of the general population, and the tangible and psychological impacts of environmental damage (to name a few). So how can we move from the current status quo of unhealthy, invulnerable working environments to ones that enable individual and collective thriving, and capacity to seize the emergent opportunities that reveal themselves in the process of adapting to change?

Responding to these challenges demands courage, creativity and collaboration within and between people, organisations and different sectors. It requires a capacity for managing complexity, thinking beyond what's possible, and shaping radically new ways of working and being together, in balance with the natural environment. In this research, the top determinant of individual and team creativity and ability to thrive was "psychological safety," where "team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other." The behaviour of leaders has the greatest influence on enabling this vulnerability, and the biggest barrier is shame, evoked by self-protective behavior, dominating the conversation, criticism, micro-managing and resistance to emotional openness. Shame leads to silencing and denial, mistakes and a lack of innovation – all fatalities that encourage a scarcity mindset, and collective inability to adapt and respond to systemic challenges with agility and self-awareness.

This finding was mirrored in the fifteen research interviews, survey responses and desk research undertaken for this paper. Interviewees were all leaders within the cultural sector, representing a diversity of artforms, geographical location, age, ethnicity, disability and gender, and each one chosen for the work they are doing in some way to make social and environmental change in the sector. While not all interviewees and survey respondents found that the word "vulnerability" resonated for them, most identified it with a courageous capacity for honest relationships, inclusivity, creativity, innovation, collaboration and partnership, learning, adaptability to change, collective leadership and shifts in power dynamics. For some, vulnerability was also associated with

acting with integrity and compassion, sometimes with great cost (in the case of whistleblowing). For others, it was a doorway to new business models and transformational learning.

This research identified three pillars for how vulnerability – i.e. embracing uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure – can be practiced to improve resilience and enable courage, creativity and collaboration:



There is a fundamentally important balance that underpins this model, and the choice to embrace one's vulnerability. For individuals, the balance is in being open *and* grounded in self-responsibility. Vulnerability for the purpose of victimisation is disempowering and can lead to more damage, including emotional manipulation. For organisations, the balance is between vulnerability and accountability. Clarity around expectations, roles and responsibilities, and processes that plan for and support risk-taking create a structure or "container" in which vulnerability can remain safe and unlock transformative possibilities for individuals and the whole organism.

How leaders behave sets the tone for organisational culture, and how the organisation reinforces positive behaviours through values and processes, determine the quality of relationships that emerge. This dynamic means that people and organisations develop in tandem – organisations can support personal development through culture, practices and investment in people, and the behaviour and values of individual leaders can impact the organization through transformational leadership. In addition, individual and collective behaviours and values influence the wider social culture we participate in by modelling new possibilities.

The key themes that emerged under each sphere in the model are:

- Leaders embracing vulnerability
    - Self-authorship
    - Authenticity
    - Values-led
    - Collaborative and inclusive

- Co-creating mutual relationships
    - Active listening
    - Honest and timely communication
    - Inclusive of difference
    - Reframing failure as learning
    - Letting go of control
    - Finding common language to build understanding
    - Distributing responsibility
    - Learning from and valuing the ways that artists work

- Holding the space: structures and processes
    - Establishing a shared vision
    - Increasing interconnection
    - Eco-centric decision making
    - Emergent strategy and distributed leadership
    - Using creative processes like design thinking
    - Planning for risk
    - Rituals that build community and belonging
    - Investing in people

There is huge potential for the arts and culture to take on a leadership role in the social, environmental and political challenges that are rapidly unfolding around us, and indeed be better recognised for the leadership that artists and cultural leaders are already demonstrating. But sustaining our capacity for changemaking, and taking up our position at local and global decision-making tables requires us to turn inward too. By doing the "inner work" to cultivate safe, resilient and creative relationships with ourselves and others, we also grow our capacity to influence the external environment with the creativity, courage and collaboration that it demands.

Definitions

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is derived from the Latin noun "vulnus" meaning "wound." The Oxford Dictionary defines it as: "The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally" (English Oxford Living Dictionary). This definition of vulnerability as a susceptibility to harm is found in many different iterations depending on the field of study.

Vulnerability researcher Brené Brown, on the other hand, defines it as **"**uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" and adds that "weakness often stems from a lack of vulnerability – when we don't acknowledge how and where we're tender, we're more at risk of being hurt." [1] Her definition is not necessarily so different, but it balances the skew towards a negative outcome of exposure in the Oxford definition, leaving the door open to more possibilities.

"Our rejection of vulnerability" writes Brown, "often stems from our associating it with dark emotions like fear, shame, grief, sadness, and disappointment—emotions that we don't want to discuss, even when they profoundly affect the way we live, love, work, and even lead. What most of us fail to understand… is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences that we crave… Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose… vulnerability is the path".[2]

This is the definition and understanding of "vulnerability" that was used in this research, and its resonance with the definitions offered by survey contributors themselves is striking:

[1] Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly*. London: Avery Publishing Group, 2015. Book.
[2] Ibid.

This collective insight reveals the delicate and paradoxical balance between the risk and opportunity of vulnerability.

Resilience

Janet Lesedma provides a detailed overview of conceptual frameworks on resilience in relation to leadership development:

> *Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune and is essential for the effective leader. The literature demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the stress of the leader's job and their ability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cash, 2001; Copland, 2001; L. Greene, 2003; R. R. Greene, 2002; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004; Ledesma, 2012; Patterson, Patterson, & Collins, 2002). Survival, recovery, and thriving are concepts associated with resilience and describe the stage at which a person may be during or after facing adversity. The concept of "thriving" refers to a person's ability to go beyond his or her original level of functioning and to grow and function despite repeated exposure to stressful experiences (O'Leary, 1998). The literature suggests a number of variables that characterize resilience and thriving. These variables include positive self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk-taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance, and a high tolerance of uncertainty (Bonanno, 2004; Carver, 1998; Masten, 2005; O'Leary, 1998; Patterson et al., 2002; Ungar, 2004).*[3]

Consolidating her overview, the definition used for this research: "Resilience is the ability to bounce back from exposure to adversity and stress, and develop beyond current levels of functioning to grow and adapt to change and uncertainty with a combination of positive mindset, self-awareness, strong social resources, risk-taking, determination and perseverance."

It's worth noting that notions of "bouncing back from" and "growth" imply learning, reflection and an acknowledgement of these moments of "adversity, frustration and misfortune" at the very least. It could be said that true resilience, therefore, requires being "vulnerable" to these experiences, to avoid the risk outlined earlier that "weakness often stems from a lack of vulnerability – when we don't acknowledge how and where we're tender, we're more at risk of being hurt".[4]

Cultural Leadership

This research recognises a two-tiered definition of "cultural leadership."

The first, is the leadership of cultural organisations and activities. This is defined by the British Council as "the act of leading the cultural sector. Like culture itself, it comes from many different people and can be practised in many different ways. It concerns senior managers and directors in subsidized cultural institutions; public officials developing and implementing policy for the cultural sector; and a

[3] Ledesma, Janet. "Conceptual Frameworks and Research Models on Resilience in Leadership." *SAGE Open* July-September 2014: 1-8. PDF. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244014545464>.

[4] Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly*. London: Avery Publishing Group, 2015. Book.

huge range of producers, innovators and entrepreneurs in small companies, production houses and teams. In the cultural world, nobody has a monopoly on leadership."[5]

This democratisation of who leads in the sector is also mirrored in the Julie's Bicycle Creative Climate Census (2014 and 2018), which found that action on environmental sustainability was predominantly being led by professionals in junior and middle management roles (in 2014) with senior leaders increasingly engaged by the 2018 census. Anyone, it seems, can initiate and lead change, though support from senior leadership can accelerate the pace and impact.[6]

The Clore Leadership Programme strongly align cultural leadership with "change-making" and with the implication of context, it's also important to include a definition that extends this notion of change-making as cultural leadership to a broader context. The second tier of our definition is cultural leadership as leading or changing a culture, or cultural movement. In his 2007 paper, Rising to the Occasion, Graham Leicester writes:

> *If we are really living in a time of cultural crisis, where old cultural and social norms are in flux and new ones are emerging, then the real task of cultural leadership is to help evolve the culture. It is a process beautifully described by my IFF [International Futures Forum] colleague Aftab Omer… He suggests that in times of stability the centre of a culture is conventional – dense with rules, norms, taboos – while the periphery is marginalised, even scapegoated. During periods of dynamic change, however, like today, the centre becomes more receptive to the different and the unknown:*
>
> > *'Cultural leaders choreograph this interaction in ways that are creative and transformative. In this way cultural leadership is distinct from political and administrative leadership. While political leaders primarily make rules and administrative leaders primarily enforce rules, cultural leaders like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Mother Theresa find principled and imaginative ways to transgress those rules that inhibit the emergence of cultural sovereignty and creativity. Their actions engender new and unexpected meanings. The recognition and creative transgression of rules and norms is at the heart of cultural leadership. Cultural leaders are able to transmute how they are personally affected by the culture into creative action that midwives the future.'* [7]
>
> *We should recognise in this description of creative transgression and dynamic engagement with the other precisely the conditions for personal – and societal – growth…* [8]

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[5] "What is Cultural Leadership?" n.d. *British Council Creative Economy.* PDF. <https://creativeconomy.britishcouncil.org/media/uploads/files/Cultural_Leadership_2.pdf>

[6] Julie's Bicycle. *Creative Climate Census*. 2018. PDF. <https://www.juliesbicycle.com/resource-creative-climate-census-2018>.

[7] Omer, Aftab. *Leadership and the Creative Transformation of Culture*. 2005.

[8] Leicester, Graham. *Rising to the Occasion: Cultural leadership in powerful times*. March 2007. PDF. <https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/23974676-Rising-to-the-Occasion-by-Graham-Leicester-2007.pdf>.

Building on these perspectives, the definition adopted in this paper is: “Cultural leadership is the act of leading and making change in and through the cultural sector – a role which can be assumed by anyone working in the sector. Cultural leaders not only run effective organisations and deliver cultural activity, they also lead and change broader social cultures by challenging and transgressing norms and creating meaning.”

Methodology

In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen cultural leaders from a variety of organisations across the UK (and one from Switzerland):

Alison Tickell, CEO, Julie’s Bicycle | London
Clare Reddington, Creative Director, Watershed | Bristol
David Jubb, Artistic Director and CEO, Battersea Arts Centre | London
Deborah Williams, Executive Director, Creative Diversity Network | London
Hannah Bird, Co-director, Bird and Gorton | London
Jo Hunter, CEO, 64 Million Artists | London
Jo Verrent, Senior Producer, Unlimited | Yorkshire
Matt Fenton, Artistic Director and CEO, Contact Theatre | Manchester
Mehrdad Seyf, Artistic Director, 30 Bird | Cambridge
Moira Sinclair, Chief Executive, Paul Hamlyn Foundation | London
Nick Capaldi, Chief Executive, Wales Arts Council | Cardiff
Nico Daswani, Head of Arts and Culture, World Economic Forum | Geneva
Piali Ray, Director, Sampad Arts | Birmingham
Sade Brown, Founder, Sour Lemons | London
Tony Butler, Executive Director, Derby Museums and Founder, Happy Museum Project | Derby

Interviewees were selected based on several criteria, the most important being that they were in some way paving new paths, not only for their own organisations but for the sector as a whole – paths designed to bring us into the 21st century and improve our resilience in relation to issues such as climate change, social equality, and a changing economic landscape.

The rationale for this was that if we could understand whether there is a relationship between vulnerability and cultural leadership in the experience of individuals and organisations leading transformative change, perhaps there would be valuable insights for those not yet as comfortable with stepping into the unknown.

Other criteria for selection were to include a variety of organisations of different sizes, artforms and geographical spread, with representation from diverse-led companies and individual leaders of different ages and backgrounds.

A theoretical framework of existing scholarship and writing was drawn together to inform the interview questions, and is woven through this report to contextualise and support the conclusions I have drawn from the interview data. Similarly, references were drawn together during and after the

interviews to support insights that emerged or to incorporate references offered by interviewees themselves.

I also conducted an online survey which drew responses from a further twenty-three cultural leaders.

Overall, with interviews and survey results I gathered twenty-five Female and twelve Male responses. People's job descriptions included Artistic Director, Chief Executive, Executive Director, artist, curator, director, writer, coordinator, consultant, freelance creative, head of departments. Sector represented were museums, libraries and archives, performing arts, visual arts, music, outdoor arts and multi-artform work.

As such, the data collected in this research process overall is not necessarily a comprehensive, representative sample – it has, for example, more women contributors than men – but reflects some of the diversity of people and practices in the sector. As many of the interviewees were selected for their reputation as "changemakers" they may not necessarily be representative of the average, if such a thing exists in a sector as diverse and deviant as culture. The results are skewed somewhat towards the perspectives of those who have an interest and, in some cases, a core purpose in being outside the "mainstream" cultural sector in order to challenge and shift it.

Findings

I think we are in a time of fundamental change. But we don't know it, and that destabilises us… we are lost, and we don't know what to pull on. So, those of us of a particular age and a particular schooling in the western world – all the things that we've been taught should save us are not saving us anymore. And because we've not had the word 'vulnerable' as a positive, the feeling of vulnerability is incredibly destabilising for people.
– Deborah Williams, Executive Director, Creative Diversity Network

The Context

The pace of change in today's world was by far the biggest challenge to the research contributors. Austerity and cuts to arts and local authority funding, climate change, the migrant crisis, Brexit and inequality were some of the systemic challenges that kept people up at night. There was a sense that the foundations of knowledge – of what we have been certain about in the past – are no longer reliable or fit for navigating the world, especially not as a lone individual. This connected to a practical struggle with stretched resources – money, but also a lack of capacity and a "culture of busy-ness and distraction in the sector"; a lack of investment in people; and a lack time – both actual and perceived arising from issues like managing competing priorities.

Audience development, and the relevance of arts and cultural activity to the general public, was also a red flag – one contributor mentioned the Warwick Commission report which revealed that only 8% of the UK's population routinely engaged in publicly funded arts activity[9]. Several others mentioned Brexit, and the disparity between 96% of the arts and cultural workforce voting Remain[10] – out of step with nearly half the country. Contributors also provided an exhaustive list of institutional hang-ups that held them back from being adaptable in the face of an ever-changing and uncertain environment: lack of diversity, systemic inequality and oppression, top-down decision making and micro-management, adversity to risk, resistance to change, unclear roles and responsibilities, hubris, and the difficulty of succession planning (in this case, for the founder of an organisation).

And underpinning all of this was the deeply existential domain of hope, fear, connection and meaning. Fear of the unknown, of not being good enough, of being alone, of external threats like climate change, job security and prejudice. And desire – to have an impact, to work for a purpose, and the courage to have trust and faith in their vision for change.

[9] The Warwick Commission. "Enriching Britain: Culture, Creativity and Growth." 2015. *University of Warwick.* <https://warwick.ac.uk/research/warwickcommission/futureculture/finalreport/warwick_commission_report_2015.pdf>.

[10] Creative Industries Federation. *Creative Industries Federation*. 2017. Web site. <https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/policy-and-research/brexit>.

These circumstances have been termed by the International Futures Forum as a "conceptual emergency… in which the world we have created has outstripped our capacity to understand it. We are experiencing a step change where complex human systems now operate within other complex systems, often with modes of thinking and practice developed in simpler days. This is a new world, raising fundamental questions about our competence in key areas of governance, economy, sustainability and consciousness. We are struggling as professionals and in our private lives to meet the demands it is placing on traditional models of organisation, understanding and action. The anchors of identity, morality, cultural coherence and social stability are unravelling, and we are losing our bearings."[11] As interviewee, Hannah Bird, mentioned – "knowledge is a brilliant thing when it enables you to act, but not when too much of it overwhelms you… the greatest challenge for leaders at the moment is being ready to adapt to change, ready for a future that isn't set in stone." This increasingly complex social reality is compounded by the urgency of accelerating issues like climate change, for which the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has given twelve years to avoid run-away and catastrophic impacts, fuelling new movements like Extinction Rebellion and the Sunrise movement in the USA.

It's clear from these research findings that this conceptual emergency is being felt at the individual and organisational level. Despite the public narrative around the arts and culture being about engagement, community, connection and belonging, research by the Victoria University, Melbourne (2016) showed that levels of anxiety in the entertainment sector were ten times higher than that of the average population, and instances of depression five times higher. Reasons for this included frequent bullying, sexual abuse, long and unrewarding working hours and a lack of appreciation for years of commitment.[12] Suicide ideation is also proportionally higher, and in the UK, this has led to the establishment of initiatives like ArtsMinds mental health support service.[13] The #MeToo movement and revelations of sexual harassment by senior figures in entertainment has exposed that in the UK 80% of arts workers are aware of harassment having taken place, and 48% have experienced it directly, but the majority of incidents still go unchallenged.[14] And the raft of "burnout" references about the creative industries anecdotally suggests an epidemic there too – a state of mental and physical exhaustion also associated with a loss of psychological connection to the work.[15] The lack of consistent public dialogue and sector-wide action on these chronic issues has led to a state of conscious denial, where many are feeling the effects of this working culture, but change is slow and often unsustainable.

On top of this, despite much talk about the need to address diversity, power and privilege in the arts and cultural sector – particularly relating to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and class – much of

[11] International Futures Forum. *Conceptual Emergency*. n.d. Web site. <http://www.internationalfuturesforum.com/conceptual-emergency>.

[12] Entertinment Assist. *Entertainment Assist Resources and Education: Working in the Australian Entertainment Industry*. October 2016. Web site. <https://www.entertainmentassist.org.au/our-research>.

[13] *Arts Minds*. n.d. Web site. 16 February 2018. <http://www.artsminds.co.uk>.

[14] Richens, Frances. *Pulse report: Sexual harassment in the arts - is enough being done?* 24 November 2017. Article. <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/pulse/survey-report/pulse-report-sexual-harassment-arts-enough-being-done>.

[15] Forge, Samantha. *Less is More: On burnout in the arts industry*. 21 February 2017. Blog. <https://www.killyourdarlings.com.au/2017/02/less-is-more-on-burnout-in-the-arts-industry/>.

the activity to date has been "tokenistic,"[16] leaving people of colour, those with disabilities, people from working class backgrounds and other protected characteristics struggling to work and participate meaningfully, on their own terms, in the cultural sector. Piali Ray, Director of Sampad Arts, emphasised that the impact of economic vulnerability across the arts sector is even greater for diverse-led arts organisations.

People – including leaders – feel vulnerable, and to deny the severity of it by sustaining a surface level "invulnerability" to the impacts of this conceptual emergency risks far-reaching consequences. The question of vulnerability and leadership, then, is central to the sector's resilience and survival.

Vulnerability in Cultural Leadership

My inspiration comes from my artistic practice. As Kenneth J Foster says in his paper, Thriving in an Uncertain World, "the artistic process itself contains within it the seeds of our organisational survival... We recognize the constantly changing environment and adapt and respond accordingly. We know we are thought leaders for our culture, so we innovate, we try new ideas and approaches and view each endeavour not as a success or failure but simply another incursion into a deeper understanding of who we are. In doing so, we provide leadership to our world. And we behave like the artists we are."
- Survey contributor

The challenge of building a thriving sector and embracing the potential of the arts and culture to shape and evolve new possibilities for uncertain times, is a profoundly creative and relational one. It depends on being able to call out denial, nurture courage, build equitable communities, and create possibilities for the imagination to flourish and birth new actions. So, what is it that creates the conditions for this radical thinking and doing together?

During a two-year initiative to study team effectiveness, code-named Project Aristotle, Google assessed two hundred and eighty teams across the organisation and found one major distinction between innovative and non-innovative teams – psychological safety: a state where "team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other."[17] Amy Edmonson, the Harvard academic who coined the term, describes it as "a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes."[18] Psychological safety is essentially what makes or breaks a team's ability to thrive and supersede normalcy, and it is largely determined by the behaviours modelled by team leaders. Avoiding vulnerability, engaging in self-protective behavior, speaking over people and talking for too long, criticism, jockeying for the leadership position, micro-

[16] Meghji, Ali. *Diversity Is A Myth In Middle-Class Cultural Spaces*. 12 April 2018. Web Page. <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/diversity-is-a-myth-in-middle-class-cultural-spaces_uk_5ace33c0e4b064876775f404>.

[17] Joseph, Lauren. *Is your team in 'spychological danger'?* 12 April 2016. Web Page. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/team-psychological-danger-work-performance/>.

[18] Edmondson, Amy. *Building a psychologically safe workplace*. 4 May 2014. Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8>.

managing and resistance to emotional openness were all found to making teams prone to silencing, mistakes and a lack of innovation.[19] While there are many drivers for these behaviours, there is often one fundamental emotion at the core, and that is shame.

Shame has a role in "a wide range of mental and public health issues including self-esteem/concept issues, depression, addiction, eating disorders, bullying, suicide, family violence, and sexual assault." Some researchers now describe shame as "the master emotion of everyday life" and "the main concerns related to shame are the feelings of being trapped, powerless and isolated".[20] On the flip-side, teams that enabled everyone to contribute equally, had high social sensitivity for intuiting how others felt based on tone of voice, expressions and other non-verbal cues, and connected with each other on a personal level, perform much better across the board.[21]

Despite creativity being the sector's raison d'etre and core business, the environments that are designed to incubate are not always providing the right conditions for it to flourish, evidenced by the significant mental and emotional stress in the previous section. When asked what felt vulnerable to them, contributors mentioned developing artistic work, taking creative risks and "going into new ground" for both creative development and organisational development, major organisational change e.g. redundancies or mergers, disagreeing with superiors, whistleblowing, negotiations about money, receiving feedback, admitting to failure or not having all the answers, and sharing personal challenges – a neat correlation with our definition of vulnerability and "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure." The questions they were most afraid of revealed anxieties about the quality and impact of their work; personal performance and other people's perceptions of their leadership effectiveness; challenges negotiating money and communicating personal worth; and existential questions about survival – personally and organisationally.

These internal challenges are also reflected in the ecology of the sector as a whole. Mehrdad Seyf, Artistic Director of 30 Bird, spoke also about the power imbalance between institutions that operate and define their work by what will enable the institution to stay safe, while those with less power are left exposed and vulnerable as they try to negotiate or resist the status quo set by those who hold resources and influence from the margins. This entrenched inequality means that the risk of breaking new ground – in Seyf's case, breaking through traditional artforms – is shouldered most acutely by those with the least power, until the results of their courage are proven and then mainstreamed. The emotional labour of this work is largely unrecognized and under-valued.

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[19] Goller, Ina and John Bessant. "Chapter 7: Practising psychological safety." Ina Goller, John Bessant. *Creativity for Innovation Management*. Taylor & Francis, 2017. 344. Book. <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OiwlDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA176&lpg=PA176&dq=Kathleen+O%E2%80%99Connor+psychological+safety&source=bl&ots=g2n7bP8S2U&sig=VlW-8fEamNHW-ibLC_7v99qpaV8&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjurOrhzYzaAhXqAcAKHY8HBp8Q6AEIWTAL#v=onepage&q=Kathleen%20>.

[20] Brown, Brené. "Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame." *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 87.1 (2006). PDF. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/818f/8d345731bec204c1d1b861cd3c469944354d.pdf>.

[21] Duhigg, Charles. *What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team*. 25 Feburary 2016. Article. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/magazine/what-google-learned-from-its-quest-to-build-the-perfect-team.html?smid=pl-share>.

Perhaps it is no surprise then, that, when asked what the impact of leaders practicing vulnerability could be in the cultural sector, contributors overall felt that it would lead to:

Healthier and more resilient people and working environments

- closer, more honest team dynamics
- better self-care, and less isolation, perfectionism and burn-out
- greater openness, generosity, trust, equality and respect
- better listening
- a learning culture that accepts failure and encourages growth and adaptability
- a greater sense of purpose, meaning and commitment, distributing ownership of the mission and organisational pride
- motivation and productivity

More creativity and innovation

- more collaborative approaches drawing ideas from a more diverse pool of people
- more support and appetite for risk

These insights give a steer on what values and behaviours need to be modelled to create creative and connected cultures, and the role of vulnerability in the process. In the conversations with cultural leaders and in the generous, detailed contributions to this research from survey respondents, the relationship between vulnerability and cultural leadership was revealed to be a rich and fertile landscape – one in which self-authorship and authenticity are co-evolving with more open, accepting, diverse and emergent organisational cultures, and wider paradigm shifts. Finding ways, as in Foster's quote above, of "behaving like the artists we are" in the task of building organisations and cultural ecosystems that thrive.

Gender

Several male and female contributors mentioned gender, suggesting that perhaps vulnerability was more relatable to women. Alison Tickell, Director of Julie's Bicycle gave her perspective:

> *I think women do have a different take on leadership, it is (generally speaking) much more collaborative and attuned to a wider set of emotional reference points; it's not so focused or self-interested, but with that comes a great deal more transactionality – a relational context to everything you do. It's a much harder place to be.*

Doing justice to the comprehensive field of gender and leadership studies was outside the scope of this report, but it's important to acknowledge the issues raised by contributors, particularly around assumptions of what constitutes "masculine" and "feminine" leadership. Assumptions about feminine leadership from interviewees were that it is more relational – collaborative, inclusive and compassionate – with a tendency towards holistic thinking. Male – or "heroic" – leadership was characterised as directive and structural. One male interviewee wondered whether the fact that he did not relate to "vulnerability" as a relevant word in relation to leadership was because he "was a man," and, while every woman who was interviewed or responded to the survey related to

"vulnerability" as a recognisable aspect of their experience as a leader, not all men did. One male survey respondent responded: "Vulnerability implies weakness, harm and exposure to suffering. While I am completely in favour of the model of leadership outlined in your definition [of vulnerability], I don't think it's helpful in the context of elucidating new ideas about leadership and collaboration ... I would prefer to see this behaviour in the context of generosity, inclusion and humility." It is interesting that other respondents associated these three words (or "values") with vulnerability when prompted to define it for themselves, and before being shown the definition used in this research. It's not causal that this discomfort with "vulnerability" is gender-based, but it's important to note that there was not a unanimous consensus amongst male respondents and interviewees of the relevance of vulnerability to resilience or leadership.

That said, four out of six male interviewees identified with the definition of vulnerability in leadership and both interview and survey data provided enough cross-gender comparison to draw some relatively holistic conclusions for this sample. This fluidity in the relationship between gender and vulnerability (recognising that gender is also a spectrum which includes many identifications beyond the man / woman, male / female binary) could be related to the inconclusive attempts to find clear gender distinctions in the field of leadership studies, due to the complexity of distinguishing between social, cultural, contextual and biological influences, and despite a recognition that a bias exists in favour of white male leadership.[22]

A Fine Balance

The majority of interviewees and survey respondents saw a link between vulnerability – as defined in this paper – and leadership. The nature of this relationship was two-fold: the vulnerability of the cultural sector in its current place in a wider context of uncertainty and change; and vulnerability as a core trait or as related to the leadership traits that were desirable in leaders who are well-equipped to lead in this context, like honesty, kindness, transparency, empathy, generosity, courage, integrity and humility.

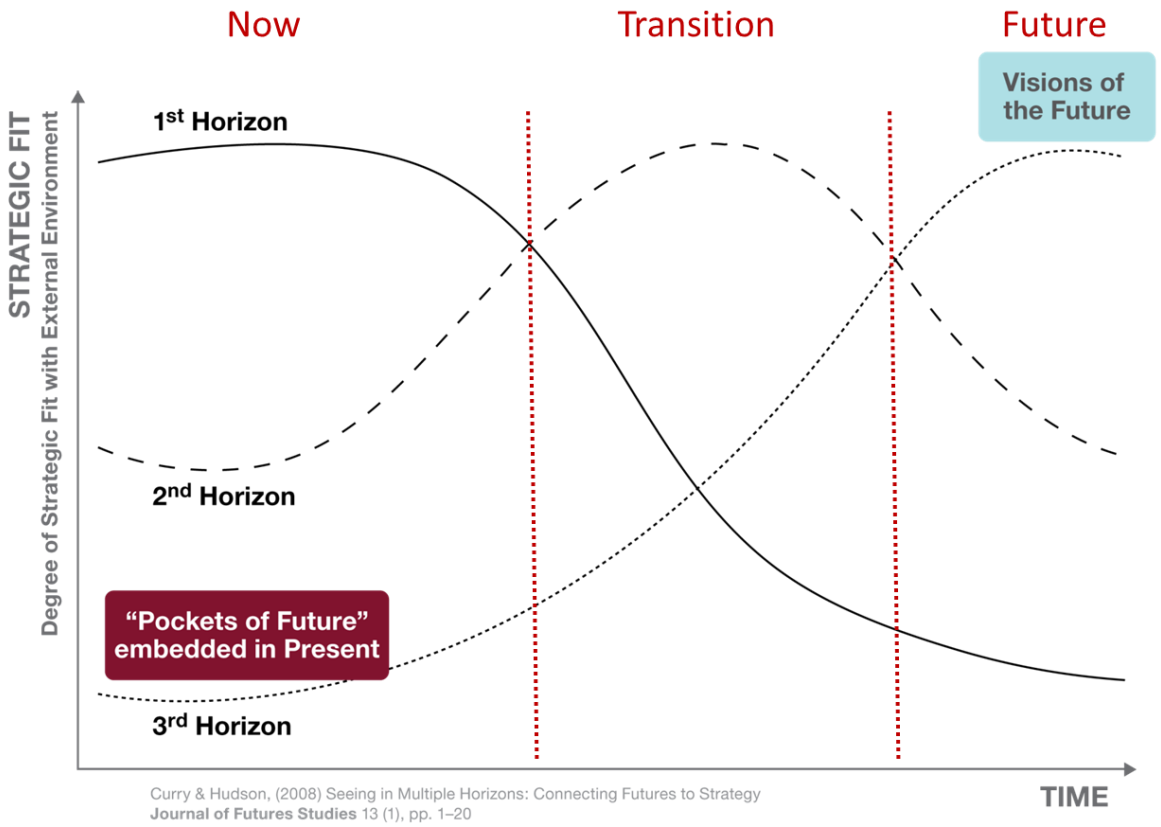
[22] Schedlitzki, Doris and Gareth Edwards. "Leadership, Gender and Diversity." *Studying Leadership: Traditional and Critical Approaches*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018. PDF. <https://uk.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/61014_Schedlitzki_and_Edwards_Final_Proof_ch12.pdf>.

The "most important leadership traits" for leaders in the cultural sector – survey results.

The majority of contributors to this research were positive about the potential impact that practicing vulnerability could have if leaders in the sector were to embrace their vulnerability, and saw this as part of a wider shift in our understanding about what good leadership constitutes, away from notions of strength, stability, and individual "heroic" leadership towards values-led, collaborative, distributed and diverse leadership. That said, the concept of "vulnerability" was accompanied by a nervousness about the risks of exposure, loss of control, being perceived as "weak" and victimisation or focusing too much on what's hard rather than can be done. This was mirrored in the fact that, on average, the survey respondents were slightly more comfortable with other people's vulnerabilities in the workplace than with their own.

As such, a distinction emerged in the research process between the state of "being vulnerable" and susceptible to harm, and "vulnerability" as a capacity for self- and situational acceptance and optimism that unlocks courage, creativity and meaningful connections. This distinction gave rise to a sense that embracing vulnerability – in the words of one contributor – calls for "a balanced kind of practice, perhaps inspired by the martial arts, where vulnerability and defence go seamlessly hand in hand." This metaphor is apt for the kind of vulnerability explored in this research – the concept of "defence" in many Eastern martial arts is not one of resisting attack: it is dynamic, working with the attacker's energy and turning it back on them. A state of flow and agency, open and responsive, rather than static and defensive.

This principle of balance, enabled by openness and responsiveness, was present in how individual leaders related to vulnerability and their experience of organisational vulnerability. Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons model for managing transformative change is a useful systems thinking tool, used by Watershed, to conceptualise the state of organisational vulnerability that they, and many of the interviewees I spoke to, are experiencing.



Called a process of "patterning hope" the horizons show the transition from the status quo (H1), to a new system that is fit for the emerging reality and new opportunities it presents (H3). The middle ground (H2) is, in Bill's words:

> *The second horizon is the transition and transformation zone of emerging innovations that are responding to the shortcomings of the first horizon and anticipating the possibilities of the third horizon. New ways of doing things emerge in messy ways, brought about through some combination of deliberate action and opportunistic adaptation in the light of circumstances.*
>
> *Entrepreneurs must judge the moment, and bring together ideas and resources to try a new way of doing things here and now. They live in an ambiguous territory where the old ways are dominant but the new is becoming possible… Entrepreneurship is hard and most attempts to do new things fail; it is much easier to serve the old systems, and established H1 players typically dominate.*[23]

This liminal zone of experimentation and discovery is a place of possibility and hope, but also one in which we encounter fear as we step into the unknown. Interviewee Mehrdad Seyf, Artistic Director of 30 Bird, drew from his experience as a psychoanalyst to describe how we often seek a "cure" for this sense of fear in the unknown, but that a "cure" is not possible – the only way we can make our way out of the "black hole" of uncertainty is to take a step into the darkness, because in embracing and

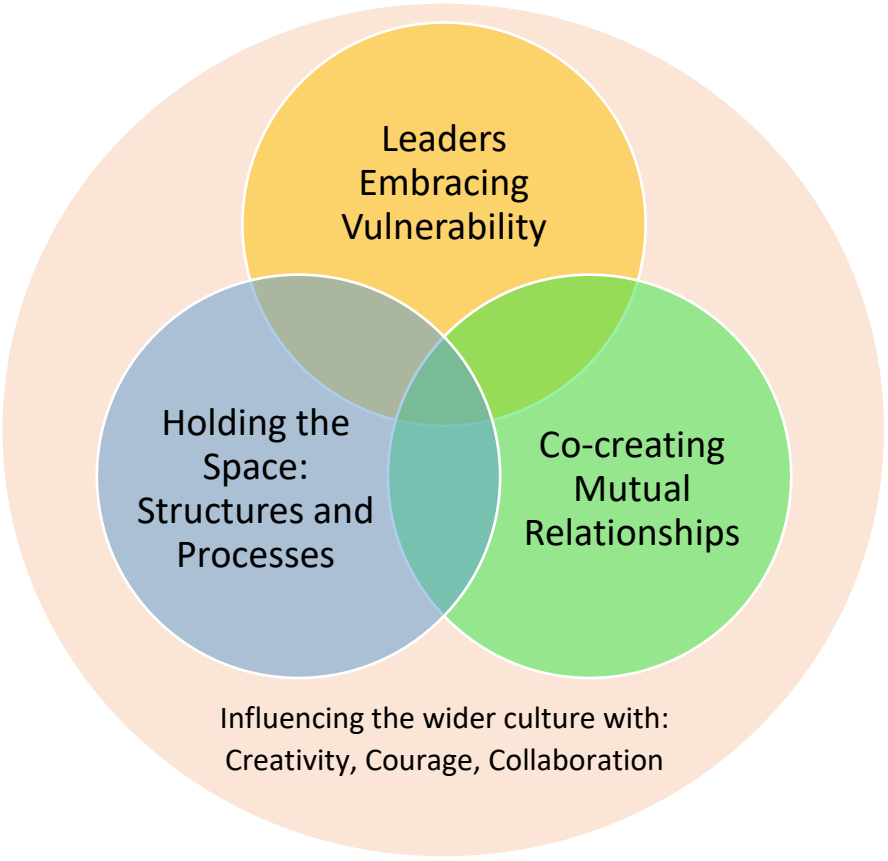
[23] Sharpe, Bill. *Three Horizons: the patterning of hope*. 15 February 2015. Blog. <https://leadersquest.org/blog/three-horizons-the-patterning-of-hope>.

understanding the nature of it, we can find new ways of moving through it. It's more about a process of discovery and engagement than arriving at a defined destination.

This organisational vulnerability to the ambiguity and fragility of being in transition can either have fatal consequences, or open new pathways towards the future. Those organisations more firmly rooted in the existing system – funding bodies or large institutions, for example – anecdotally found less opportunity and more struggle in transition than smaller, more agile organisations with greater independence and more porousness and greater ability to respond to external opportunities.

How leaders operating in this liminal space are developing resilient and collaborative ways of being and doing is explored in the rest of this report, and has been grouped under three headings:

- Leaders embracing vulnerability
- Co-creating mutual relationships
- Holding the space: structures and processes to support vulnerability



These interrelated themes explore the relationship between the values and behaviours of individual leaders, the difference that vulnerability makes to teams and organisational culture, and how organisational processes and structures can help create the conditions for people to be more vulnerable with each other in appropriate ways that benefit them individually, as a community, and the wider ecology they operate within.

Our moment of disruption deals with death and rebirth. What's dying is an old civilization and a mindset of maximum "me"—maximum material consumption, bigger is better, and special-interest group-driven decision-making that has led us into a state of collectively creating results that nobody wants. What's being born is less clear but in no way less significant. It's something that we can feel in many places across Planet Earth. This future is not just about firefighting and tinkering with the surface of structural change. It's not just about replacing one mindset that no longer serves us with another. It's a future that requires us to tap into a deeper level of our humanity, of who we really are and who we want to be as a society. It is a future that we can sense, feel, and actualize by shifting the inner place from which we operate. It is a future that in those moments of disruption begins to presence itself through us. This inner shift, from fighting the old to sensing and presencing an emerging future possibility, is at the core of all deep leadership work today. It's a shift that requires us to expand our thinking from the head to the heart. It is a shift from an ego-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an eco-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself.
– Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, Leading from the Emerging Future

Leaders Embracing Vulnerability

Leaders that are comfortable with their vulnerability demonstrate several shared competencies and values. While there are not universal, there was significant enough over-lap to merit generalisation:

- Self-authorship and authenticity
- Values-led
- Collaborative

Self-authorship and Authenticity

Self-authorship means that instead of depending on external values, beliefs and interpersonal loyalties, an individual relies on internal generation and coordination of personal beliefs, values and loyalties.[24] It is a source of personal authority that integrates values, beliefs and relationships with actions.[25] Contributors shared how embracing their vulnerabilities empowered them to reframe perceived weaknesses as strengths or opportunities to do things differently (their "own way") and work with other people. Owning their experience, rather than accepting other peoples' value judgements of them, gave them control over their "story" and therefore agency to choose a different narrative (much like our martial artist in the previous section). This was associated with authenticity, and qualities that contribute to resilience and thriving, such as positive self-esteem, self-compassion and a sense of coherence.

[24] Baxter Magolda, Marcia B., Elizabeth G. Creamer and Peggy S. Meszaros. *Development and Assessment of Self-Authorship: Exploring the Concept Across Cultures*. Stylus Publishing, 2010. Book. .

[25] Kegan, Robert. *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Harvard University Press, 1998. Book.

Examples of this came through contributors like Sade Brown – Founder and CEO of Sour Lemons, a creative leadership programme for young creatives from diverse backgrounds – who set up the company to give more young people from working class communities like the one she grew up in a chance at crafting a career in the arts. She designed the programme using her own experience of overcoming anxieties about whether she had a place in the arts and culture, receiving mentorship from other women, and using skills from the creative process (in her case, theatre-making) to reflect on and reframe past experiences as sources of strength of character and motivation. By owning her own vulnerabilities – past and present – she makes it possible for others to do the same and surpass their assumptions and expectations of what's possible. Similar accounts came from disabled artists and leaders like Deborah Williams, Executive Director at the Creative Diversity Network, who reframed being disabled as an experience that endows her with an immense capacity for lateral thinking and appetite for taking risks to do things differently, not despite the difficulties of living with a physical condition but precisely because of them. This involves working with major media companies to improve diversity in leadership, and she spoke about how she uses her personal experience to open space for as wide a group of people as possible – "people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, women and disabled people" – whilst also being an intermediary between the institution and these underrepresented groups, and a compassionate and creative problem-solver for institutions which are fearful of the uncertainty posed by changes – and challenges – to their current ways of working, and exposure of (un)conscious bias.

The shift from external to internal authorship means that rather than seeking certainty or stability by controlling external circumstances or other people, leaders seek certainty within, and recognise that they have a greater capacity to influence external circumstances by taking responsibility for their own values and behaviour. They recognise that reframing the way they relate to themselves is essentially the same as reframing the way they (and others) relate to the external world. Jo Verrent, Senior Producer of Unlimited, said that "if you start to recognise it [the imposition of value judgements], then reflect on it, and then own it, everything becomes much more understandable because that's exactly the same thing the planet is going through; that's exactly the same thing the funding system is going through… you suddenly realise nothing is fixed and that we're all doing the best we can at any particular moment with the knowledge that we have at that point." Self-compassion with one's own vulnerabilities led to greater compassion for other people's vulnerabilities; becoming comfortable with uncertainty, when combined with clear communication, modelled that it was possible for others to do the same.

Likewise, speaking up courageously to tell the truth, whether it be to share the truth of a personal story of overcoming hardship of achieving change, honesty in a conversation between two colleagues, or "speaking truth to power" (sometimes with difficult personal consequences) required individuals to embrace their own vulnerability, but also created the context for others to speak up and find new communities of interest and passion, and confidence to act differently. Much of Julie's Bicycle's work pivots on connecting people who are passionate about making environmental change, but feel isolated or unsupported within their organisations, to a committed, informed and generous group of peers to share knowledge and build communities of practice who can amplify and support one another's efforts. In this way, the process of self-authorship and authentic expression can lead to new possibilities for collective leadership, and the formation of new movements and narratives that extend well beyond one 'self'.

Interviewees also spoke about consciously turning up the volume on their own personalities to give others permission to be themselves too. Clare Reddington, Creative Director of Watershed, talked about purposefully being a bit loud whilst working in the studio to set the tone that people didn't have to "play by the rules", and had permission to be imperfect and have fun. Brené Brown explains perfectionism as "the belief that if we do things perfectly and look perfect, we can minimize or avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame. Perfectionism is a twenty-ton shield that we lug around, thinking it will protect us, when in fact it's the thing that's really preventing us from being seen".[26] Perfectionism is an emotionally exhaustive and isolating state that feeds feelings of not being good enough, self-sabotage, over-work and imposter syndrome, so modelling that being "perfectly imperfect" is important for fostering an emotionally healthy workplace. Overcoming the tyranny of perfectionism is a huge personal and organisational driver for Jo Hunter, CEO and Co-Founder of 64 Million Artists:

> *We all start off life as painters, musicians, inventors, explorers, but often it gets knocked out of us as we get older. Someone tells us we can't sing, or our dancing is embarrassing, or our ideas aren't very good. And gradually we stop doing them. [At 64 Million Artists] We believe that when we get the time and space to reconnect with those aspects of ourselves it can be fun, empowering, and beneficial in all aspects of our lives.*
>
> *I know that from personal experience. Four years ago, I was someone who always had to get everything right. I was terrified of failure and never started anything unless I thought I would be good at it. I found myself feeling stuck, flat, and anxious about life – and so I took a month off work and got people to set me different creative challenges to do every day. It changed my life. I met people I would never have met, I had to take a risk and fail every day, I realised I didn't have to be perfect to be OK.*

This sense of self-authorship is related to the notion of cultural leadership as being counter-cultural, transcending norms and creating meaning. Self-authorship is a meaning-making process which connects to a deep sense of purpose extending from the individual into their sphere of influence, often forming the foundations for collective initiative. It is the basis for personal resilience, and can also create meaningful communities of support and change underpinned by authentic shared experience. It is forged in the capacity to go beyond what's known and comfortable, to embrace truth and take a stand.

[26] Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly*. London: Avery Publishing Group, 2015. Book.

Values-led

If you believe in being authentic and acting with integrity, which I think are personal values to me, then acknowledging vulnerability is part and parcel of that. You cannot be authentic without acknowledging that you have vulnerabilities, because everyone has vulnerabilities. And similarly, if you're creating an organisation that is responsive to the operating environment and is trying to address inequalities and to dismantle power dynamics (which we're quite explicit about now), you have to acknowledge that you – as the institution – don't have all the answers... you can't say "we want to address inequalities and dismantle power dynamics, but we have all the solutions." That's kind of crazy. So, for me, there is absolutely a relationship between my values, the organisational values and actually expressing some vulnerability both personally and organisationally.
– Moira Sinclair, Chief Executive, Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Values and vulnerability have gone together hand in hand throughout this research process. Values shape culture and behaviour at all levels – personal, organisational and systemic. They connect a leader's authenticity, motivations and actions with organisational culture and purpose, and vice versa. They also determine the ways in which leaders and organisations work with external collaborators, and how they treat their stakeholders and audiences. If psychological safety is the soil that nurtures creativity and resilience, then values are the nutrients that keep the soil healthy. Values shine a light on the need for change, and guide people through the decisions and actions we need to make to achieve it. The feeling of one's actions being out of line with values was one of profound discomfort, leading to disengagement. Examples of where this was felt by contributors was in the ethics of publicly-funded cultural institutions that prioritised the development of creative work guided by the vision of a sole leader, versus leaders co-creating a shared vision centred on the people and communities that the institution exists to serve.

In research interviews, vulnerability was associated with values like openness, generosity, kindness, empathy, love, honesty, integrity, authenticity, equality, diversity, humility, mutuality, transparency and truth. These values relate intimately to self-authorship, authenticity and trust, and underpin much of the competencies and practices that follow. Most of the interviewees were clear about their values, and explicitly mentioned their importance in their identity, decision making and sense of purpose.

Collaborative and Inclusive

Many of these values connect with tendencies towards distributed and collaborative leadership styles. The key to this was the capacity to recognise different kinds of expertise in other people and different kinds of organisations, including lived experience, and empower them to step into leadership roles or collaborative tasks that best utilise their knowledge. This distributes responsibility and the organisation's capacity to manage complexity, which is crucial given the theme in our survey results showing some leaders found it difficult to admit to not having all the answers.

At Watershed's Pervasive Media Studio, resident Aiden Moesby has been a critical friend to Creative Director Clare Reddington and her team in thinking about how the organisation can better support people with mental health issues. As someone who suffers himself, he has suggested how staff can "check-in" with people appropriately. The impact of the organisation's responsiveness is clear in his blog post on the Watershed website:

> *I find Pervasive Media Studio one of the spaces where I feel comfortable. It does start with Sookie on the desk … the fact I can just give Sookie an accurate and true emotional barometer reading when I come in is useful in that not only does it convey some sense of where I am at but also I get a chance of checking in with myself. It allows me to take the next step into the room - in the past that has been impossible for me and even when I have arrived at the door I have had to turn around and go home. The strength of the studios' accessibility is that it is not obtrusive, it is almost invisible. Yet it is so responsive. It is a space that allows me to be me as much as possible, it has been a space where I have been able to find the right conditions to undertake research, to learn and develop - both professionally and personally. It is a place where I feel I have been able to be an artist and whether I identify as disabled or not has largely been irrelevant although not unimportant.*[27]

Recognising expertise in people's lived experience and acting on their advice to find ways of incorporating it (in this case, Sookie's daily greeting) makes it possible for people to show up as their best selves, feel valued, build supportive alliances and co-create a more compassionate culture for everybody. This theme was underpinned by an awareness of privilege and diversity and a need to bring in different voices with lived authority on the matter at hand.

Similarly, Matt Fenton, CEO and Artistic Director at Contact in Manchester, was very clear that he was not the "boss" at the theatre. He had been interviewed and appointed by a panel of young people, and four years on he still sees the young people engaging with Contact as the experts in theatre with and for young, diverse audiences. His mandate to lead is interdependent with their empowerment to be the change that Contact is seeking to make, namely: "Contact is where young people change their lives through the arts, and audiences of all ages experience exciting new shows. To do this we … place young people at the decision-making heart of everything."

Beyond the internal benefits of collaboration, inclusivity and dismantling power and privilege hierarchies, interviewees spoke about the importance of collaborations across disciplines and experts beyond the cultural sector in addressing the increasingly complex challenges and pace of adaptation required. Hannah Bird, sharing experience from her residency with the interdisciplinary design team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab, said:

> *There is something about vulnerability or jeopardy which helps people come together because there's a need. When things are great you don't think you need your neighbour, but we forget that in order to reach out in those moments of vulnerability we need to nurture and sustain those relationships.*
>
> *During my time at NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab there was a real desire to come together because there was an implicit understanding that the challenges that the organisation faced – internal challenges and also scientific challenges, like how they would send people to Mars – were not possible to solve alone. I think people in the cultural sector have now amassed a lot of knowledge and are trying to use different types of thinking to arrive at actions, and that's a great motivator for coming together… but when leaders are faced with huge*

[27] Moesby, Aiden. "Look ok, feel crap." 13 February 2018. *Pervasive Media Studio.* Blog. <https://www.watershed.co.uk/studio/projects/digital-and-creativity-research-based-exploration-potential-and-integration/blog/look-ok>.

challenges and risks, there's a tendency to shut down and stick with what's worked in the past. I'd argue that trying to resist that and remaining open to thinking from other sectors and individuals enables leaders to better meet the challenges in the long run.

This kind of collaboration requires high trust, the humility to recognise the value of different kinds of expertise, and the ability to stay in uncertainty for longer than is usually comfortable to arrive at "breakthrough" solutions. This was also seen by Nico Daswani, Head of Arts and Culture at the World Economic Forum, as fundamental to leadership in an increasingly complex world:

When I collaborate with colleagues from science, geopolitics and sustainability on programming, we are discussing the implications of the same issues – like technology – on society. It's harder to do this in collaboration, but it's also much more relevant – people don't want to know the specific perspective of arts OR science on these issues, they want a coherent and thought provoking way of thinking about these things. We choose not to focus on simply advocating for the importance of the arts, instead we demonstrate its importance through programming which artists and scientists (for example) create together…

Vulnerability is a key human attribute that is sorely lacking in leadership today. Being able to assess one's limitations and one's place in the world is related to a certain kind of humility. This isn't a negative thing, it's not self-deprecating, it's about seeing one's place in this moving ecosystem – who you are and what you can contribute. I often say to my team [at the World Economic Forum], imagine if all these people were to leave with more questions than answers? That's what we're supposed to do, our role [in the arts team] is to help people formulate questions, so that they can see how much they don't know. Many of our elected leaders project the opposite, and this is also part of the hubris we see in Silicon Valley at the moment – everything is just an algorithm away, everything is controllable, everything is there to be monetised and managed. It lacks humility and trust in the intelligence and capacity of others. Vulnerability is not insecurity, it is very rooted in a sense of self, time, purpose and true awareness. When we acknowledge what we don't know, we can make better decisions by seeing that we need to be more consultative and more diverse; that we need to take a step back before we make a decision, because our decisions are going to impact a lot of people in ways we don't yet understand and we should try to mitigate that.

Modelling collaborative leadership and inclusive decision making are necessities of the uncertain times we live in, and are leadership traits that emerge from the self-authorship and humility of being vulnerable.

Co-creating Mutual Relationships

Otto Sharmer, Senior Lecturer at MIT Sloan School of Management and author of Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future As It Emerges (2016), defines three major divides or disconnections that underpin the systemic imbalance of our time:

- our personal and systemic disconnection to the natural world and the capacity of the planet to support human survival;
- the divide between the individual and community (local and wider) and the growing disparity in social equality and distribution of wealth;
- the disconnection we feel as individuals between what matters to us and our wellbeing, and the behaviours and values that we enact in our personal and working lives which support a dysfunctional system.

In their book about 21st century leadership competencies, Dancing on the Edge, Graham Leicester and Maureen O'Hara write: "In the operating conditions of the 21st century it is impossible to be competent alone. Competence is a function of culture, which is a function of relationship. This is not only a plea for attention to teamwork, collaboration and other competencies relating to an individual's performance in group settings. It is a deeper acknowledgement that we create our own lives in a pattern of relationship with other lives, and always have done."[28] Resilience, then, as well as the creative pursuit of designing a better system, is relational. There is acknowledgement in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals that to overcome the complex and interconnected challenges we are faced with to create a stable and equitable society, epitomised by Sharmer's three major divides, collaboration and partnership across organisations, disciplines and cultures is critical. The evidence for it is clear. The Paris Agreement, the world's first unanimous global agreement on climate change, reached in December 2015, was forged by new process of "collaborative diplomacy", demonstrating that it is at the intersection of government, business, civic society and culture that transformative change, and resilience, is achieved. (What has happened since is an unfortunate example of how consistency is required to make new cultures stick and evolve.)

Embracing vulnerability was a source of more meaningful and authentic relationships within teams and outside of the workplace amongst several interviewees, and more productive collaborations. It was associated with distributing power, flattening hierarchy, and empowering people to co-create and co-lead the organisation towards a shared vision, rather the vision of a single individual. Relationships with colleagues, board members, audiences, project participants, and people who shared the same passion and interests were a huge source of courage for contributors.

By embracing vulnerability, leaders (and remember, leadership isn't necessarily hierarchical in the cultural sector) made the following possible:

Sharing personal challenges – with trusted colleagues or collaborators to help manage the implications better. For example, Jo Verrent (Unlimited) spoke about how telling her team when she was feeling unwell helped them manage their expectations and responses to changes in her behaviour

[28] Leicester, Graham and Maureen O'Hara. *Dancing at the Edge: Competence, Culture and Organisation in the 21st Century*. 2012

or availability. By being truthful and transparent about the reason for the temporary change, her team is able to adapt with less anxiety and a more supportive attitude, and a culture of trust emerges making it possible for everyone to do their job more effectively.

Asking for help – one survey respondent shared how being honest and transparent about organisational difficulties created the context for others to step up:

> *When I took over the management of a [dance] company, I informed the dancers that the company was in financial trouble and explained that I would need their support to turn the company around – I then told them how I was proposing to do it. They informed me that they had never been spoken to so honestly before and they all committed to working with me to do what had to be done. Their support and loyalty was humbling.*

The combination of honesty, clarity and responsibility about the process is what several contributors posed as the necessary cocktail for vulnerability to be shared in a way that doesn't result in loss of face for the leader, or panic in those receiving the information. Instead, a culture of trust, shared responsibility and empowerment can emerge in the context of a common purpose – in this case, saving the dance company.

Listening to understand – was mentioned frequently as a competency associated with vulnerability. Listening deeply to colleagues, stakeholders, participants and audiences had outcomes including more empathetic and trusting relationships, especially for new leaders coming into post, because people felt heard and validated.

Tony Butler, Executive Director of Derby Museums, talked about listening as a critical part of leading a change to put audiences at the heart of programme design and delivery. By engaging the "resisters" and getting curious about what was driving their resistance, he realised that rather than disagreeing with the concept it was the pace of change that most were struggling with. While he risked opening himself up to criticism, listening equipped Tony and his team with a better understanding of the challenges, more information and options from which to find a solution, more positivity and commitment from staff or stakeholders to participate and co-create change, and an improvement in staff retention.

Similarly, Nick Capaldi, Chief Executive of Wales Arts Council, talked about how "the legitimacy of power structures are being challenged all the time and one has to be aware of that… personally I don't have a problem with that, I'm quite happy to see anything I say or do challenged, I quite enjoy it because I like to see ideas changing, taking shape and improved through a process of debate... and there's a heightened sensitivity around how these things are managed because we're trying to come out of a period of the arts being delivered by patriarchal, white, male institutions, so, being of that demographic myself, I'm conscious of being especially vigilant… it's important to be humble, open and resist dogma."

Creating compassionate cultures – what sits behind Aiden's experience at Watershed's Pervasive Media Studio (detailed in the Collaboration section above) is in fact a purposeful culture of care and kindness, modelled and stewarded by director Clare and her team:

Kindness is at the heart of the Pervasive Media Studio, we look after each other - which allows space for risk taking… sometimes that kindness is just bearing with people while they fail, and then start

again… People are also quite open with their emotions. There is crying, laughing and celebration. I'm quite open about how I'm feeling. I don't often see then need to filter my emotions and seem to attract others with similar characteristics – so it ends up being encoded in the DNA of the space.

And Watershed is no fluke. Research shows high quality connections (HQCs) are fundamental to employee performance and can make organisations more creative and resilient. The quality of connection is defined by a heightened experience of positive emotion and energy; a sense of being positively regarded – leading to feelings of being respected, cared-for, and understood; and the degree of mutual vulnerability and responsiveness in full engagement in the moment of connection (Stephens, Heaphy and Dutton). These qualities have also been named as compassion, defined as "a 4-part experience of noticing someone's distress or pain, interpreting it as relevant and important, feeling concern for that person or group, and acting to alleviate their pain … if people feel like they belong and genuinely care about one another, they will be more creative, resilient, and eager to contribute at work. It's tempting to ignore distress and suffering and pretend like they have no place in our offices. But the human experience of pain is going to show up, whether we invite it or not, and the only way to respond is with compassion"[29]. Indeed, hiding from pain is what weakens leaders and organisations: "Those who think they are not susceptible or vulnerable… were in fact, the most vulnerable"[30].

Inclusivity – connected to Watershed's culture of kindness is its success in cultivating a diverse community of residents. The Pervasive Media Studio attracts a mixture of arts and tech inventors and small start-ups, all of whom have found a home there because they don't "fit in" in other digital accelerators or arts organisations: "we get people who haven't found support from anywhere else or don't find they belong to traditional spaces". The Studio has a membership of 47% female inventors and a match to Bristol's BAME demographics – unusual compared to many other tech clusters.

The Studio residents are often vulnerable in the sense that "they're usually trying to do something very new - where they don't know who will buy it, who wants it, what it's worth." In other words, a creative community innovating at the edge of safety with no guarantee of commercial return. By offering them acceptance, limiting barriers to entry (including offering free space), and being porous to their particular vulnerabilities, the Pervasive Media Studio is tackling a challenge that other leaders listed amongst the questions they were most afraid to ask, and gaining a reputation for being front-running innovator in the arts and culture.

Letting go of control – by recognising other people's expertise, interviewees also created a more distributed leadership ecology around them, where people are empowered to contribute their ideas, take initiative and apply their knowledge. This didn't always come naturally – several interviewees confessed to being "control freaks" jokingly, but were aware of the ways in which this behaviour could shut down other people's agency and increase their own burden of work and responsibility, and were consciously trying to strike a balance. As Nick Capaldi offered, "there is nothing less creative than someone who thinks they are right all the time." Some were acutely aware that it was not actually possible for one person to control an organisation of their size and complexity (Watershed, for example), and that if someone tried it would be a disaster. An important distinction was made between control and things like accountability, responsibility, maintaining focus and quality. These

[29] Worline, Monica C., Jane E. Dutton and Ashley E. Hardin. *Forming Stronger Bonds eith People at Work*. 6 October 2017. Article. <https://hbr.org/2017/10/forming-stronger-bonds-with-people-at-work >.

[30] Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly*. London: Avery Publishing Group, 2015. Book.

were reinforced in different ways, including regular project meetings, clear roles and responsibilities, a clear vision, and opportunities to reflect and learning from failure to improve quality and practice.

Reframing failure and perfectionism – when mistakes are treated as learning opportunities – where "failure" provides insights into what can be improved – people are more able to offer bolder, "riskier" ideas, and disclose personal learning from mistakes that might be of use to others, without the fear of being shamed. This goes hand in hand with resisting a culture of perfectionism.

Shifting power dynamics – related to giving up control, many of the contributors talked about vulnerability in the context of shifting privilege and power structures. It was voiced as a necessary ingredient to offering space and distributing power to under-represented groups – young people, people of colour, people with disabilities, women, LGBTQ, and people with working class backgrounds, for example.

Collaborating effectively – this was not limited to collaborations within the arts and cultural sector, or the organisations art form. This theme was underpinned by a need to engage beyond comfortable and traditional cultural partner and reframe the organisation's relationship with audiences and the general public. Contributors were all collaborating more than ever before in their work, and increasingly with other disciplines – academics from the sciences and engineering, healthcare professionals, local authority and public service commissioners, and policymakers across a variety of impact areas from climate change to wellbeing – and seeing this as a necessity for resilience. As Jo Verrent mentioned, "the idea that there is a separation between the arts sector, charitable sector, and environmental work [for example] is a false divide… they all interconnect." Actively creating partnerships and collaborations with these other sectors has brought several interviewees into new environments that stretched their comfort zone. Reflecting on their place in these new domains, when combined with a capacity to face their vulnerability, led to new ways of communicating and framing their value and legitimacy in these spaces, but was still a challenge for some. By being clear about values and upfront with potential collaborators about working preferences or outcomes, contributors formed more transparent, resilient and productive collaborations. More importantly, being comfortable with vulnerability meant that people were able to address difficult issues more effectively by being honest about the issues and open to feedback and problem-solving.

Matt Fenton, CEO and Artistic Director of Contact, spoke about collaboration in the process of making theatre. Increasingly, Contact are receiving commissions from commissioners in healthcare, housing and policing as a result of engaging directly and deeply with a diverse range of communities across Greater Manchester. Commissioners often come with a preconceived idea about what kind of story they expect to see, and the negotiation to allow for more creative risk and nuance in the storytelling is delicate. They navigate it by being clear about their value as theatre-makers in crafting an impactful and nuanced experience, and that the conditions for this are enabled by a license to experiment and venture beyond boundaries that commissioning bodies are not always able to achieve. In the rehearsal process itself, which is usually devised iteratively, commissioners, clinicians, domain specialists, research advisors and young people who have direct experience of the issues explored in the work, all participate. Managing these relationships and expectations requires the vulnerability to have difficult conversations and manage the anxieties of collaborators and commissioners not used to working in this way. The benefits of working like this, however, far outweighs the cost of managing these relationships – more interesting work, an embeddedness in the social and governing fabric of the city, and new audiences who come to see issue-based work that resonates with their lived experience, their communities or their professions.

Adapting our language – several contributors, particularly those collaborating with people and organisations (including funders) from different sectors mentioned the importance of stripping away jargon, and finding more accessible ways of articulating the way we work in the cultural sector. Communication challenges were cited as barriers to partnership building, and accessing opportunities simply because there is a poor understanding of what the arts and culture does and is capable of contributing to social, environmental and economic outcomes beyond the intrinsic artistic value of the work. The humility of adapting the discourse around artistic work was a factor in successful collaborations, particularly those that develop over the long term and contribute significantly to the social and financial resilience of cultural organisations and individual artists.

Seeking emotional and developmental support – while several contributors expressed a feeling of loneliness "at the top", those who spoke more openly about embracing vulnerability also seemed to value and invest in stronger support networks. They recognised the complex range of emotions – fear, sadness, overwhelm, grief – provoked by leading change, and had ways of expressing and articulating this with others or alone, whether it was "having a good cry over EastEnders" or picking up the phone to a colleague after a hard week. Support networks tended to be confidential to build trust and make exposure feel safe, especially when with sector colleagues. Examples of these were action learning sets, informal groups who get together to support one another over dinner or an activity, leadership development communities like Clore, and an invitation-only online network for women in the arts and culture. Those who did not have access to these networks, or had not nurtured alternative ones, expressed a desire to be more connected in this way. One-on-one emotional and psychological support also came from family, friends, colleagues, board members, mentors, coaches and therapists, and this support was seen as critical in forming new copying strategies beyond catharsis.

Response-ability – referring to the capacity to adapt and respond effectively to life events as they happen, leaders were not only more effectively response-able when they embraced vulnerability, but they encouraged it in others too. By accepting difficult conversations, sudden changes in circumstance, new information and other challenging changes rather than avoiding or attempting to suppress them, leaders and their colleagues enabled one another to arrive at solutions or processes for managing change more effectively and with less resistance and loss of energy.

Situational judgement and trust – the caveat raised by several contributors was acknowledging when "oversharing" personal challenges can be used as a manipulative tactic to avoid doing work or taking responsibility, or could result in a loss of respect. Intention, situational judgement and taking responsibility (see self-authorship) are all key. Interviewees talked about the sensitivity of deciding when vulnerability felt possible, and how to own and communicate it in appropriate ways – a return of the notion of balance.

Redundancies, for example, was a situation in which several people felt that exposing their own vulnerability was not appropriate – their priority was holding the space for others. That said, one interviewee described how, at a leaving party for staff who had been made redundant, she shed a few tears during her speech, and that after having been very stalwart during the process this moment was hugely valuable for departing staff to see that the emotional impact was felt by those leading the change – it was a spontaneous and authentic expression that rekindled human connection. The important distinction is between intending the act as an exchange of empathy, not as a means to gain validation or externalise a need for self-expression.

It is in the accumulation of these moments of genuine connection that trust is established. Brown identifies that "trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention, and full engagement. Trust isn't a grand gesture – it's a growing marble collection"[31].

Valuing and learning from artists – it bears saying that the most vulnerable people, and also the most comfortable with vulnerability, are artists. Their practice and creative process is the basis for many of the insights in this report, and yet they are financially the least valued and among the most disempowered leaders in the cultural ecology. Contributors raised the imbalanced power dynamics of the sector in interviews and mentioned institutionalization and "professionalization" as a trend that needed questioning, especially as institutions were already seen to hold much of the power and control of resources, despite often being at risk of lacking relevance or being unable to keep up with the pace of social, economic and environmental changes.

Some artists undertake personal risks in their art making, which expose not only personal vulnerabilities but wider injustices that can be harder for people to relate to as distant news stories. Nico Daswani, Head of Arts and Culture at the World Economic Forum, spoke about how many of the artists he works with – in the words of Iranian-American artist, Shirin Neshat – "don't have the luxury of being political, this is what we do." Their vulnerability and experience gains power and makes an impact on others by becoming embodied through the act of making and storytelling in defiance of the systems of oppression that seek to silence them. Exposing their inner and external vulnerability in turn exposes the reasons why it exists, and presents the possibility for transformation, for addressing challenges at their root cause. This opportunity to available to non-artists too, connecting back to the findings around self-authorship and finding strength in honest and timely explorations of what "makes us tender".

The empowerment of artists who model this kind of courage also depends on the support of platforms and organisations that enable artists to share their work on their terms, allowing its inherent cultural value – and social, political or environmental impact – to be apparent in the way it's made, and why. Just as this research found that organisations which are psychologically safe spaces for employees correlate with creativity and resilience, they also need be providing this safety to artists and freelancers too. Daswani talked about how the "equalising platform" of the Davos World Economic Forum event creates opportunities for artists and cultural institutions to meet with speakers from politics, science, business, faith communities and civil society, where possibilities for working together – that are otherwise out of reach for many arts and cultural organisations and practitioners – can emerge. The role of his team is one of stewardship: "there's a lot of caring from our side, we try to be Sherpas for the artists and institutions navigating how to take a seat at the table."

Artists were also seen as systems thinkers by many contributors – already adept at navigating uncertainty and fear, convening people and holding space for emergent ideas to arise, and therefore apt captains for the uncharted seas ahead. Both Deborah Williams and Mehrdad Seyf directly related their capacity to facilitate challenging, interdisciplinary and diverse collaborations to their identity as an artist, their resistance of categorisation, and their comfort with traversing different communities and spaces. There was an imperative to own the strengths of artist-led practice and leadership, and – for Jo Hunter of 64 million artists – to make the creative process more present, accessible and democratic for non-artists too.

[31] Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly*. London: Avery Publishing Group, 2015. Book.

Holding the Space: Structures and Processes to Support Vulnerability

With good intentions, we are serial risk managers. Yet we often iron out the very human creativity that will enable our growth and development. For all the hand-wringing about climate change we are failing to address CO2 levels in the atmosphere. Is it surprising that we cannot tackle this global catastrophe when our day to day organisational frameworks and structures fail to connect us to ourselves and to each other? Unless we are vulnerable together, it is hard to imagine that we will come up with a creative and collective answer.
– David Jubb, Artistic Director and CEO, Battersea Arts Centre[32]

Structure

While values and competencies are important, structure and methodology are too. Speaking of Watershed's growing community, Clare Reddington confirmed: "we need to put a bit of structure around our openness otherwise we'll just be completely over-capacity and unable to welcome anyone."

Shared vision
Almost all of the interviewees – including those from both institutional and artistic roles – expressed that their vision was not the product of one person's ideas. Their visions were co-created with their colleagues and, in some cases audiences, and represented a shared understanding of the organisation's purpose that increasingly for some is even transcending the artform that they're traditionally associated with (Battersea Arts Centre incubating a museum, and Contact programming music and radio projects). In the case of organisations like Julie's Bicycle, the vision and mission are determined by the challenge the organisation seeks to overcome – environmental damage and climate change – and is shaped in response to the question: what is the best thing we can do now? This guiding torch brings people together with the same sense of determination and coherence that self-authorship provides for the individual – the acknowledgement of adversity that, when owned, becomes part of a positive drive for change, rather than a threat.

Growing corridors to increase interconnection and create flow
One strategy the Studio team have found resonates (introduced by Bill Sharpe of the International Futures Forum) is to "grow the corridors not the clusters, allowing ideas and people to flow, but not always growing in size" – i.e. increasing connectivity between staff and residents in the Pervasive Media Studio, and outside organisations and collaborators, rather than grow the size of the organisation itself. This creates flatter organisational models – in terms of the flow of information and ideas – and continues to bring in new perspectives, people, expertise and resources into the community. It increases their porosity whilst remaining manageable so as not to compromise the organisation's agility or community. By being clear on their value and values, having a strong shared vision and being prepared to stay "messy," open and vulnerable in the process of getting there, the organisation is better able to thrive.

[32] Jubb, David. *Being Vulnerable*. April 2011. <file:///C:/Users/sholehj/Downloads/Being%20Vulnerable.pdf>.

Eco-centric

This notion of growth emphasises the organisation's interconnection with a wider ecology, which Clare sees as ultimately working together in the same direction, and the imperative for growth – often viewed through a "scarcity mindset" as a need to grow revenue – has been reframed to focus on abundant possibilities for connection and exchange, which could also lead to resources. As part of an ecology, the organisation is perhaps more vulnerable to a more complex range of variables, but also more porous to opportunities and new possibilities for scaling the impact of its activities. Its sustainability is recognised as interconnected to the health of the wider sector, the economy and the natural environment.

Specifically in relation to organisations that are collectively adapting their way of working to be more literally "eco-centric" – aligned with environment sustainability and efforts to address climate change – Alison Tickell, CEO of Julie's Bicycle, spoke about the potential to "turn the cultural economy into an ecology that recognises value beyond the balance sheet, that's organic, the very definition of true sustainability – nothing irrevocably lost, everything regenerative… this ecology is the economy of the future, and we need those in positions of decision-making to see it too." Julie's Bicycle actively supports organisations to make this shift by providing monitoring, guidance and movement-building for the cultural sector to be "bigger than the sum of its parts" – a framework to empower action and avoid the uncertainty and paralysis that can come with not knowing how to meaningfully engage with systemic challenges.

Acknowledging this interdependence is also an opportunity for organisations (via internal leadership) to own these challenges as part of its identity and narrative – as Julie's Bicycle and Battersea Arts Centre have done with climate change; Contact Theatre has done with youth leadership; Derby Museums with democratic exhibition curation and design, and wellbeing as part of the Happy Museum Project; and 30 Bird with their UNFRAMED think tank for interdisciplinary collaboration in the arts.

Emergent and distributed leadership

The idea of creating a ten-year business plan now and sticking to it is just completely irrelevant.
– Jo Verrent, Senior Producer, Unlimited

Piali Ray put Sampad's 28-year "staying power" and success down to constant evolution in relation to its operating context: "One has to move with the times, to not get too comfortable or staid in what you do, even if it is proven. We always have to keep revisiting our purpose and relevance. And we do that on a regular basis with the board and for ourselves – contextually we need to make sure that what we're offering is important or significant and relevant to society and our market."

How this is done varies from organisation to organisation, but there is an increasing emphasis on "emergent strategy" and processes that facilitate agile working practices. In his essay on Being Vulnerable, David Jubb, Artistic Director and CEO of Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) articulates "evolutionary and non-linear processes," which "feed learning from experimentation back into the process as it evolves" as a key to how organisations facilitate more vulnerability. BAC's Scratch methodology for devising theatre – which they have now applied to the museums sector too – is a well cited example of this: artists develop work between showings with an audience who are invited to give feedback to support the next stage of development. The methodology has also been applied to the building's capital development project and has led to a change in the organisation's structure

from a traditional hierarchy to a project-based matrix, designed to leverage insight and knowledge from all corners and levels of the staff team. The structures work around three core principles:

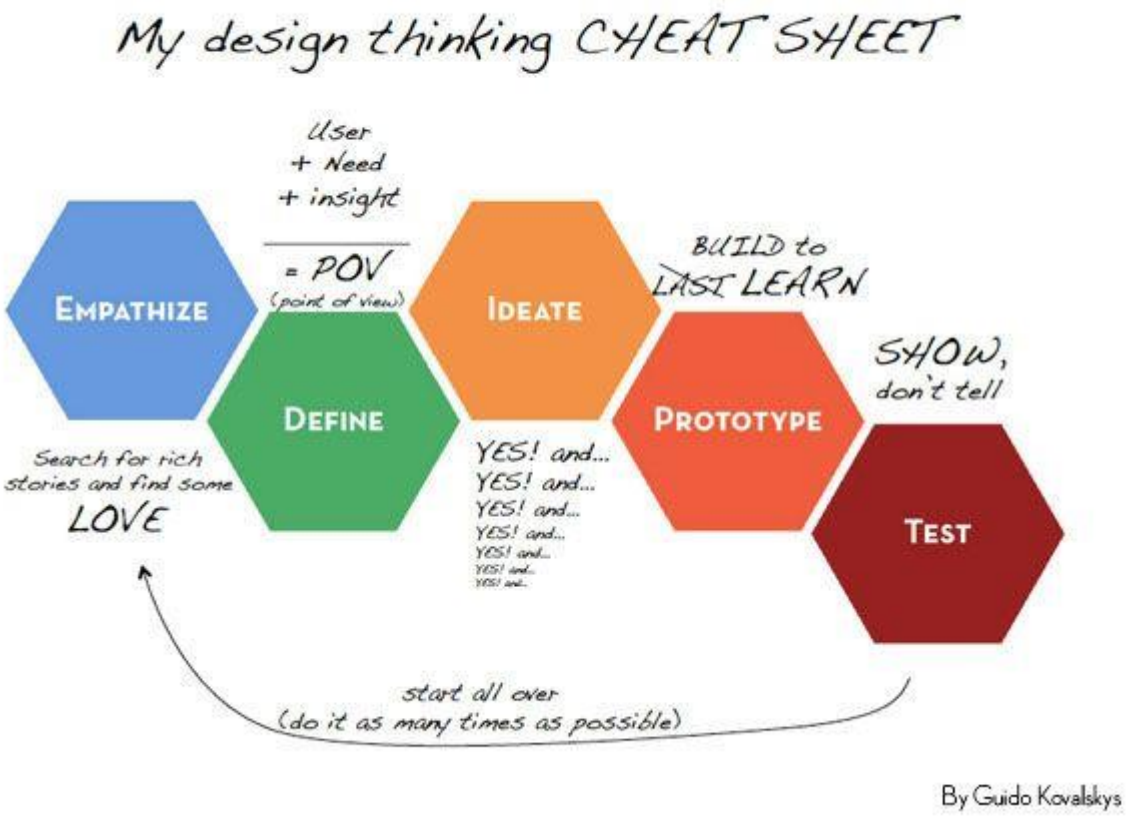
i. strong leadership and vision led by an executive team
ii. all activity broken in to projects delivered by project teams
iii. regular meetings across project teams to keep activity connected[33]

This model is not without its challenges – it has been through several iterations as it has evolved, but David and his team are committed to "challenging industrial processes" and working with structures that encourage, not silence, vulnerability, with all of the potential discomfort that brings.

Processes

Design thinking

Other contributors mentioned design thinking, or human-centred design, as a methodology that allows for emergence and co-creation. Popularised by Tim Brown of IDEO, "design thinking" is a process made up of methods and mind-sets for solving complex problems with a focus on need, experimentation and continual improvement. The Stanford d.school identify five steps to the process (adapted here by Guido Kovalskys):



[33] Jubb, David. *Being Vulnerable*. April 2011. <file:///C:/Users/sholehj/Downloads/Being%20Vulnerable.pdf>.

The mindsets that underpin this process are collaborative, iterative, deadline-driven and biased towards action, acceptance and building on learning.[34]

Derby Museums have implemented a human-centric approach to the design of the Silk Mill space, and exhibitions across other sites. It has led to members of the public co-designing exhibition spaces and concepts, and curators taking objects out from the collection into the streets of Derby to take the museum to people. This felt vulnerable to the staff who tried it, but also gave them an invaluable insight into some of the social and cultural barriers that prevent people from certain demographics and communities from visiting the museums. Experiencing their own vulnerability in unfamiliar spaces, and having to make the first move to reach out to people, opened an empathetic connection for curators that continues to challenge their approach to audience development. The design thinking process, similar to scratch, is iterative and involves "rapid prototyping" or testing out ideas in short bursts of time to "fail forward", gather learning, evaluate and redevelop for continual improvement. One word of warning from Tony Butler at Derby was to watch out that learning cultures didn't become excuses to justify failure – there is a distinction between genuine failure that generates learning through reflection, and lax standards and attention which is left unchecked because "it will be alright in the end."

Planning for risk

The idea of risk assessment is not a new one, but this kind of risk planning was not about mitigation, but for creating supportive structures to allow creative risk to flourish. Iterative and "fail forward" cultures of making help, but so does scenario planning for risk as part of early stage conceptualisation. Jo Verrent spoke about the nature of Unlimited's work with disabled artists and also with programming artistically experimental work. They have a risk register which is updated quarterly, but also criteria in funding projects which stretched the artist and wouldn't have been funded through other funding routes. Listing a piece as "red" on the risk register is not necessarily a problem if the work and the artists are strong – it's more about acknowledging the risks so that contingency can be planned for, and the artist can be supported appropriately.

Piali Ray spoke about the importance of managing expectations when it comes to developing a healthy relationship to risk, and especially in facilitating the opportunity for artists to make work and take risks in that process. She emphasised the importance of clear boundaries and roles, to protect the organisation from appearing to be "everything to everybody" and provide clarity in the support they offer to artists, and also the activities they deliver in communities: "We have to be clear about what people expect from us because we are constantly coming into contact with these needs when we invite people to engage with artistic activity – we have limited resources, and we are not social workers, or medical workers."

Rituals

Planned and purposeful moments for regular reflection and emotional processing were seen as important ways to build cultures where vulnerability has a place. Watershed's Pervasive Media Studio residents mark important moments with collective activities. The day after Brexit they made welcome

[34] Design Thinking for Museums. *Managing up design thinking: 5 steps for promoting human-centered design in museums*. 3 May 2016. <https://designthinkingformuseums.net/2016/05/03/managing-up-design-thinking/>.

signs in every European language as a way to bring the community together and create a forum for expressing and processing the heightened emotions of the election result.

Other rituals included regular meetings, or – in the case of 64 Million Artists – doing the weekly creative tasks that the organisation sets for participants around the country. Often these rituals involve a sense of play and fun – states that are associated with "flow", experimentation, lack of inhibition and social bonding. All important antidotes to invulnerability.

Investing in people

Several contributors talked about the importance of valuing people, not only with human and collaborative working practices and cultures but by investing in their development too. This was part of a recognition that the "Second Horizon" state of transition, requiring creativity, psychological resilience and strong relationships, is determined by the people who facilitate and lead through it. These organisations prioritise social capital and understand it as a critical determinant of financial resilience and abundance too. Investments include professional development training, but also personalised support in the form of coaching, mentoring, peer-to-peer mentoring, counselling, psychotherapy and wellbeing allowances in the form or money and/or time dedicated to self-care and the pursuit of creative hobbies, passions and research interests. A culture of little investment in professional development pervades the sector, with a frequently-given rationale that high staff turnover would make the investment void, but some interviewees saw staff development and turnover as a way to create relationships and "corridors" to other organisations and disciplines.

The Opportunity

In their book, Ten Things to Do in a Conceptual Emergency, Graham Leicester and Maureen O'Hara suggest that "the arts and cultural sector provides both the most promising organisational settings for the development of 21st century people, and some very impressive existing senior performers. There thus appears to be a remarkable and little recognised opportunity for the arts and cultural sector to take a lead in helping the world to understand how to develop the capacities needed to handle conceptual emergency and the creative settings in which those capacities flourish."[35]

The basis for grasping this opportunity is in being able to "show up" fully to meet the multiple and complex challenges of the 21st century head-on together, with eyes wide open, outstretched arms and a courageous heart. "Containers" are crucial in this time – places, rituals, artworks, programmes, processes and communities of interest which can create psychologically safe and compassionate environments – safe places for unsafe ideas – and facilitate collaboration and creativity in ways that are porous and responsive to what's happening in the world. Spaces where the imagination can be "decolonised" to open new possibilities for how we live with each other and the natural world. These environments are underpinned by inclusive, curious, authentic and "mutual" relationships – to borrow from the Happy Museum project – which are modelled by leaders who are wholehearted in their commitment to honesty and values-led leadership, are able to reframe their personal experiences and challenges as strengths and opportunities, and actively create space for others to do the same on their own terms. These behaviours are reinforced and embedded in organisational culture by values, processes and structures that create the conditions for people to overcome their fears and show up fully, take creative risks, recognise interdependence and cultivate reciprocity, and actively respond to change, new challenges and contextual opportunities that arise. The case studies in this report, and supporting research, all point towards a definitive "yes" – that vulnerability (in the way we define it in this paper) is indeed important to resilience and collaboration in the context as it stands.

Nico Daswani, Head of Arts and Culture at the World Economic Forum, described the experience of seeing world leaders and business CEOs at the World Economic Forum "Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2014" queue for their turn to nestle into a bean bag "on the ocean floor" to experience the 360° full-dome movie experience of Coral: Rekindling Venus. Created by Australian artist Lynette Wallworth with Producer John Maynard, and shot by Emmy Award-winning cinematographer David Hannan, the piece shows the fluorescent inhabitants of the Great Barrier Reef and gave the audience an emotional insight into the important role of corals in underwater ecosystems. The film provided a completely different backdrop to the climate discussion which was high up on the agenda – it gave attendees an emotional foundation from which to approach the issue as a human, as a part of the ecosystem at risk. It "gave them an experience of the issue without telling them how to feel," and for many it was transformational, they invested time in it despite advisors trying to rush them to their next meeting.

This capacity for culture to reach into unorthodox places, unpack complexity and hold the space for people to explore themselves as they learn about the world, make it a powerful agent for change. Daswani's insight, in response to the question of whether the sector could have more impact outside of its own echo chamber, was that this capacity for transformation depended on humility and a

[35] Leicester, Graham and Maureen O'Hara. *Ten Things to Do in a Conceptual Emergency*. 2009. Book.

willingness to engage with collaborators from different fields and sectors on their terms, whilst not losing sight of the particular nature and value of arts and cultural activity to a healthy democracy. “Speaking truth to power is much more subtle than shouting at someone. It’s about integrating systems, it’s about change, and we know that collective behaviour leads to cultural change. These things need time, energy, dedication and all of that requires generosity for an artist or an institution to recognise that they’re part of something bigger. To be political requires artists and institutions to be engaged with contemporary realities, and make the effort to go beyond criticism to help people foster that space of debate.” This call to action is mindful of the real challenges facing cultural institutions named earlier in this paper, but conscious that “we have to acknowledge our own failings and unease with change, and that the nature of today’s challenges are interdisciplinary and interconnected… We need to see our place in the bigger ecosystem, and if we can do that then we become much more relevant.” This sentiment was common amongst those interviewed for this research.

In the same way that artistic experiences provide “containers” for challenging perception, preconception, values and behaviours, so too should our cultural organisations be less prescribed, more open and accepting, and able to hold the space for people to bring all that they are to the everyday challenge of thriving. When we practice vulnerability and facilitate psychologically safe spaces for the full range of emotions that the conceptual emergency provokes in us to arise, and when we enable creativity and collaboration to flourish, then the courage to take risks, try out new ideas and invite connection increases too. The conditions in which vulnerability positively contributes to resilience is important – if people are vulnerable in situations that present a real threat to them, then it can be psychologically, emotionally and physically damaging for the individual, the organisation’s culture and – depending on the organisation’s influence – the sector as a whole. This in turn influences the capacity of individuals and organisations to respond to change, and innovate ahead of the curve. The image and aspirations of the culture sector as a field shaping the social imagination and operating at the edge of innovation depends on our capacity to embrace vulnerability, own our experiences, be self-determining in our individual and collective narrative, and put our values into action.

That will be a resilient sector indeed.

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Appendix: Survey

Vulnerability and Cultural Leadership

The purpose of this survey is to understand people's experience of vulnerability in leadership, and its relationship to resilience, courage and collaboration. This survey is aimed at managers and leaders in the creative and cultural sector. You can choose to answer it anonymously. It will take no longer than 15 minutes. Thank you for your time.

**Denotes required response*

About You

Your details will not be confidential and not shared with any third parties.

Name (optional)

Gender*

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Age*

- 18 – 24
- 25 – 44
- 45 – 64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

Ethnicity*

- White
- Mixed
- Asian or Asian British
- Black or Black British
- Chinese
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Job Title*

Organisation (optional)

Location

Sector*

- Advertising

- Architecture
- Craft
- Design
- Fashion
- Film
- Gaming
- Museums, libraries and archives
- Music
- Performing arts
- Publishing and literature
- Software
- TV and radio
- Visual Arts
- Other (please specify)

Your Experience of Vulnerability
We are interested in understanding more about how vulnerability influences leadership and organisational culture. Please answer the questions as honestly as you can. Your answers will be treated confidentially, with insights drawn from them anonymously.

What words do you associate with “vulnerability”?

Our definition of vulnerability
In this research, we are defining vulnerability as the capacity to embrace uncertainty, risk (creative and practical) and emotional exposure. Examples of how this manifests in leadership are: to lead in the interests of connection and generosity above self-interest; to be authentic and transparent with emotions and behaviour; to admit you don’t have all the answers; to empower others to lead; and to accept and reflect on failure as a necessary facet of innovation, personal growth and learning.

To what extent to do feel comfortable with being vulnerable at work? (rating scale 1 – 5)

How comfortable do you feel with other people's vulnerability at work? (rating scale 1 – 5)

What is the most vulnerable act you've undertaken in your work, and what was the outcome?

What are the biggest barriers to vulnerability in your work?

What is the impact of vulnerability on organisational culture in your experience?

Do you see a relationship between vulnerability and cultural leadership?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Why?

What do you think the impact would be if we practiced more vulnerability in cultural leadership?

Resilience
How comfortable do you feel with change? (rating scale 1 – 5)

Think of a time of uncertainty or change that you successfully navigated at work. How did you overcome it, individually and/or as an organisation?

What are the greatest challenges you face in your work and leadership at the moment? These can be internal or external, personal or organisational challenges.

What are the questions that you're most afraid of asking?

What gives you courage?

What do you think the most important leadership traits are for cultural leaders in 2018?

Collaboration
Are you collaborating more in your work that you were two years ago?

- Yes
- No
- The same

Is there a relationship between vulnerability and effective collaboration?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Why?

Thank You
We really appreciate your time and generosity in sharing your experience. Your contributions will remain anonymous. Your responses will contribute to the final research report, a series of blog articles for the sector, and practical resources on the theme of 'vulnerability and leadership'.

Follow the research as it progresses at: www.thefield.consulting/latest

We would like to share the research report with you when it is complete - please leave us your email if you'd like us to send it to you. Your details will be held confidentially and not shared with any third parties. Your email only will be used to send you updates about this research. You can unsubscribe from these updates at any time.

Email

Would you be open to us following up with you to ask additional questions?

- Yes
- No