The Challenge to Adapt: New Practices for a New Era in the Arts

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Thursday, April 11th, 2013
Memphis Symphony Orchestra

Leading from Every Chair
Portland Art Museum

Object Stories
Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County

Active Arts
A New Era for the Arts
The Old Era: Structured for Growth

- Endowments for permanence
- Fundraising trustees
- Annual campaigns
- Subscription selling

Proposition: Excellence and Scarcity
The New Era: Structured for Resilience

- Cultural professionals as enablers
- Open, nimble structures
- Engagement with community creative potential
- High levels of adaptive capacity

Proposition: Abundance and Intimacy
Organizational capacities: A New Balance

**STABILITY**
- Technical competencies
- Strong staff hierarchies
- Command and control cultures
- Rational strategic planning
- Capital Endowment
- Fixed Assets

**ADAPTABILITY**
- Adaptive leadership
- Cross-functional teamwork
- Flexible collaborative cultures
- Continuously incubating innovations
- Liquidity & Change Capital
Four organizational conditions

NEEDING MOMENTUM
- Relatively Stable
- Challenged to Adapt

THE NEW LEADERS
- Relatively Stable
- Likely to Be Able to Adapt

STRUGGLING TO SHOW VALUE
- Relatively Unstable
- Challenged to Adapt

PROMISING POTENTIAL
- Relatively Unstable
- Likely to Be Able to Adapt
Where do you place your own organization against these two dimensions?
Some Terminology for the New Era
Focus on Adaptive Challenges


- **Technical challenges** can be solved via gradual improvement in current practices – extensions of business-as-usual rather than breakthrough change.

- **Adaptive challenges** have no set procedures, no recognized experts, and no evident responses available to meet the challenge or solve the problem.

“If you throw all the technical fixes you can at the problem and the problem persists, it’s a pretty clear signal that an underlying adaptive challenge still needs to be met.”

– Ronald Heifetz
Addressing Technical & Adaptive Challenges

What challenges are we facing that can likely be solved via gradual improvement in our current practices?

✧ Who can we access to give us reliable technical advice?

What challenges do we face that have persisted despite us trying many strategies to address them? And where there’s no expert we can turn to?

✧ How can we come together in new ways to re-align our thinking and resources?
Defining and measuring success

- Simple
- Complex
- Complicated

Source: B. Zimmerman; Snowden and Boone
Cynefin framework

- Complex
  - Cause
  - Effect

- Knowable (Complicated)
  - Cause
  - Effect
  - Expert Analysis

- Emergent Practice

- Chaos
  - Cause ≠ Effect

- Stabilizing Actions

- Known (Simple)
  - Cause = Effect
  - Best Practices

Source: B. Zimmerman; Snowden and Boone
Assumptions evolve as repeated successful solutions to problems.

What was once a questionable hypothesis about how to proceed becomes a reality that is taken for granted.....
In order to innovate, organizations have to resurrect, examine, and then break the frame created by old assumptions.

Edgar Schein, *Leadership and Organizational Culture*
Innovations are instances of organizational change that:

1. result from a shift in underlying organizational assumptions
2. are discontinuous from previous practice
3. provide new pathways to creating public value
What is a fundamental assumption about your work that you’ve been questioning in recent months – and what is the evidence that contradicts it?
New Approaches for New Times
Areas of innovative practice

- New ways to engage audiences and the community
- Rethinking program formats and venues
- Involving the public in co-creating arts activities
- Using the Web to create and engage with artistic experiences
- Reconsidering the organizational role of creative artists
- Restructuring the organization for new demands and new ways of doing business
- Partnering or merging with other organizations for greater reach and impact
Five Modes of Arts Participation

• Inventive Arts Participation
• Interpretive Arts Participation
• Curatorial Arts Participation
• Observational Arts Participation
• Ambient Arts Participation

COURTESY OF ALAN BROWN, WOLF BROWN
How many of our organizations wear this banner unknowingly on their buildings? Or with pride?
Innovation is Making New Connections

- Dissolve barriers through new teams
- Use artists as problem-solvers
- Collaborate or merge
- Build critical mass
- Offer new gateways to participation
- Move from marketing to engagement
New Structures for New Times, or

What Innovation is beginning to look like in Practice
From Old to Emerging Approaches

- Mission
- Artistic Direction
- Creative Capacity
- Organizational Boundaries
- Staffing
- Financial Profile
- Governance
- Marketing
From Old to Emerging Approaches

organizational outputs and achievements

community impacts and value
From Old to Emerging Approaches

MISSION
ARTISTIC DIRECTION
CREATIVE CAPACITY
STAFFING
FINANCIAL PROFILE
GOVERNANCE

singual, handled by insiders

dialogue with external voices
creative community working together

highly selective, formally separate, seasonal

From Old to Emerging Approaches
From Old to Emerging Approaches

- strong, differentiated from others + community
- ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES
- loose, porous, emphasizing commonalities

Keywords: MISSION, FINANCIAL, STAFFING, FINANCE, MARKETING, CREATIVE CAPACITY, ARTISTIC DIRECTION, ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES
From Old to Emerging Approaches

MISSION

ARTISTIC DIRECTION

CREATIVE

STAFFING

FINANCIAL PROFILE

MARKETING

post-specialists in art-centered teams

hierarchical departments, technical specialties
From Old to Emerging Approaches

- Mission
- Artistic Direction
- Creative Capacity
- Organizational Boundaries
- Staffing
- Financial Profile
- Governance

Engage active participants with process/product

Sell products to passive consumers
From Old to Emerging Approaches

champions of change, enrolling others

core funders and solicitors for established work
From Old to Emerging Approaches

**Mission**

**Artistic Direction**

**Creative Capacity**

**Organizational Boundaries**

**Staffing**

**Financial Profile**

**Governance**

Focus on building long-term permanent assets

Emphasis on liquidity, reserves and risk capital
Systematizing Innovation
Not-for-profits should embrace innovation as a permanent part of their core competencies....

Kellogg Foundation report, 2008: *Intentional Innovation*

A rational organizational process with its own distinct set of procedures, practices, and tools.
Identify an adaptive challenge

Create an Innovation Team

Question existing assumptions

Develop innovative strategies

Strengthen adaptive capacities

Use a project “Accelerator”

Execute and assess prototypes

Enroll others and build commitment

EmcArts: A Framework for Innovation
EmcArts programs

The Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts
✧ 30 organizations to date in eight Rounds

The Innovation Lab for Museums
✧ 6 museums to date in two Rounds

New Pathways for the Arts
✧ New Haven, Denver, New York City, St Louis, San Jose, Cleveland, Chicago, Cincinnati (130+ participants)

www.ArtsFwd.org
✧ “Next practices for arts and culture leaders”
A “Lab” framework to incubate innovation projects

**Phase 1:**
- Develop the Team
- Gather data
- Test and discard ideas

**Phase 2:**
- Decide
- Build momentum
- Plan for re-entry

**Phase 3:**
- Enroll others
- Try out the innovation
- Evaluate and refine

**Timeline:**
- 4 months
- 1 week
- 4 - 6 months
A platform for sharing and learning
Trajectory of adaptive team dynamics

- High Adaptive Potential
- Low Adaptive Potential

- High Level of Agreement
- Low Level of Agreement

- Breakthrough
- Compromise
- Stalemate
- Abdication

Heat
Impacting Organizational Culture

- Typical Behaviors
- Stated Values
- Fundamental Assumptions
How new approaches get adopted

Where are ASOs? As leaders and gatekeepers, where do we need to be?

Everitt Rogers: Diffusing Innovation
It may be that when we no longer know what to do we have come to our real work

and that when we no longer know which way to go we have begun our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Wendell Berry: The Real Work
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