



→ The Way Ahead Group

the creative way to lead in the C21st

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Welcome

to the latest of an ongoing series of monthly think-pieces.

These have been commissioned to reflect the work, themes and values of The Way Ahead Group with a view to providing insights, questions and reflections which will inform your own work and way of being in the world.

In this piece, Roanne Dods, currently Director of the Jerwood Charitable Foundation explores the latest thinking on our way of being in a world of seismic change. She questions the private sector model using the cultural sector's creative producer as a possible model for us in the third and public sectors.

Roanne is herself embarking on big personal and professional changes this year and is effectively becoming her own creative producer, making manifest a variety of ideas which will help all of us to fully experience ourselves in a number of ways. This piece is part of a larger text which can be found at www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk

She attended a TWAG personal development retreat for leaders and is to join us in a coaching capacity for TWAG Scotland later this year.



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Ever since I started working more closely with the third sector, the drive has always been to emulate the people of business, to learn from the ways of the CEO's of the larger institutions, and to copy their approach to people and governance. I am trying really hard, however, not to see to the global financial crisis as simply a result of arrogance and greed at a leadership level in the major financial institutions, particularly at the point where very few take any responsibility.

Over the last few years, and with trepidation, I have been part of a group of people advocating gently that in a world of unknown paths, of massive complexity and constant change, that a different kind of approach is needed. Not everyone agrees that the time we are going through is a point of massive structural change, I know. They see this period as part of a cycle, but it is hard not to recognise the massive challenges for all of us on social, political, economic, cultural and technological terms, on a personal never mind on a global level. At an individual level this wider context is creating its own sense of overwhelm, with increases in mental health issues as never before. Maureen O'Hara, Professor of Psychology at the National University, California writes that there are three typical responses to this overwhelm: neurotic, psychotic and transformative. The first two lead to unhealthy stress, those who can manage to engage with the acute stress find a new way forward.

If leadership is about risk - about stepping off the pier into the unknown waters, then pacing the pier is not what is going to help make the leap. It is about being prepared to question assumptions and if necessary break the rules of business as usual. That is where the practice of those who work with meaning and integrity matters more and more. But also a particular level of self-consciousness, humanity, and drive.

In order to find our way through this period of seismic change, we think we need to identify the people that have a different kind of leadership approach. Maureen describes these people as having a transmodern psyche which is neither western-modernist nor non-western-tribal, nor sociocentric but is inventing new hybrid ways of being that balance the kind of psychological strategies appropriate to a technologically mediated world of 'individual rights and responsibilities' with the more basic needs for relational continuity, community, spirituality and connection to the natural world characteristic of non-modern consciousness.

She sets out the characteristics of 'tomorrow's people', the people that can navigate this existential' position that we are in as follows:

- o innovative and conservative
- o multiple truths held lightly
- o lives, thinks and acts locally and globally
- o embraces spirituality
- o thinks holistically & systemically
- o tolerates ambiguity & difference
- o reflexive learner
- o contextual 'self-in-process'
- o ethics - right action over fixed principles
- o assumes personal responsibility and accountability
- o particularist and generalist

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- o reasons abstractly and narratively
- o trusts physical intelligence

She proposes that we urgently need to develop an understanding of the dialogue between the macro-level of large-scale social changes, the middle level of organisational and group psychology and at the level of the individual

Thomas Homer Dixon offers further ideas of the qualities of 21st century people. He talks of the need in this world for a prospective mind. This is “one that aggressively engages with uncertainty and risk, one which recognises how little we understand and how we control even less. The prospective mind ... looks for ways to prevent or forestall horrible outcomes, not just through managing things - an approach that is often ineffective and sometimes counterproductive - but also by imagining and implementing more radical and far-reaching solutions. Most fundamentally, the prospective mind seeks to make our societies - and each one of us - more resilient to external shock and more supple in response to rapid change.” Even Martin Sorrell, CEO of WPP says that “In an increasingly networked world the 21st Century is not for tidy minds...trying to simplify complexity ends up destroying value” where even business is talking about keeping true to what is mission critical - and that mission is not simply what the bottom line looks like. This is familiar territory for the third sector.

There are different groups of people who understand this new world at a deeply instinctive level. You may know them in your world. In my world, the arts, we have started to see and understand these approaches through the practice of creative producers. It is probably true though that certain types of artists also work in this way. Creative producers know how to make things happen out of a vision, out of ideas, out of passion. What they do is not simply about them in themselves. They bring together a combination of personal vision and a sense of responsibility; a sense of judgement (usually artistic but also in every other aspect); they are highly instinctive decision makers, combining flexibility with clarity of purpose, opportunism with a strong sense of direction, they are the kinds of 21st Century people that we need in order to guide us into the unknown. They have the judgement, nerve and inner reserves to take significant artistic and financial risks. They match the courage, risk-taking vision and resourcefulness of the artists with whom they work.

Producers make an extraordinary contribution to the arts, and their ways of doing things are replicable in other sectors - they are more like pioneers, but of course are close to entrepreneur. They make a huge contribution to the artists whose ideas and creativity can be harnessed and realised by them and to the public whose engagement is the inspiration for the producer's drive and process. The producer helps to realise new responses and routes through the complex changes in our globalised world, makes the connections with the audiences, and works with artists to create the experiences beyond what most could imagine and create experiences that connect us to what art means in our lives.

In 'The Producers: Alchemists of the Impossible' a book commissioned by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation and Arts Council England, we chose to understand producers by commissioning a set of stories about individual producers and what they're capable of, the visions, qualities and energies that drive them - qualities which are often undervalued and unexplored by our existing infrastructure and institutions with their particular mindsets and systems for understanding what it

takes to make things happen.

The job these people do involves an all-encompassing, interwoven set of responsibilities necessary to make great ideas and projects happen. The producer might be the chief executive of a well-developed organisation with specialist teams focusing on particular aspects of the producing task, or they might function solo or lead a small or medium-sized team. As producer, however, they hold the full picture, and are responsible for the successful collaboration and combination of skills, ideas and money at work in order to realise the idea in the most imaginative way possible.

Farooq Choudhary, producer for Akram Khan Dance Company said: “An idea is born, you free it and serve it, and let it find its own path. This is the most fragile and crucial period in the creative process. It's easy to find an idea but it's infinitely harder to serve and be loyal to it. A threat can be that the idea starts to serve you. What you want to say is often not truly clear until it is said. If you stay too much in control, you're containing it. The artist is the inventor, and the producer is the innovator who innovates the product into the marketplace. How do we keep the internal world of our work sustainable for ourselves? Each time we conceive a project, it requires a new world that we must create, and we have to find a new set of rules for it. It takes a lot of emotional and physical energy to find this new underpinning for the thing you're about to build. So we plan to take time to step out, to press the pause button just for a while in two or three years.”

At different points and in different places, the producer sometimes conceives a project, becoming a leader in the creation and conception of the initiative; equally their role is to realise an artist's vision. The producer imagines, manages and delivers a project financially, and takes the responsibility for the ultimate financial outcome. He or she is responsible for finding the finance, spending the money to best effect, and achieving the best outcome for all the risk-takers. They are also responsible for how to deliver the project - its structures, partnerships, and team, its development through to full realisation, and then its exploitation and dissemination. To get the most out of it for all concerned, they must follow the story through to the end. The producer asks and answers the really big questions, resolves problems and helps those involved reach out for vision that they strive for.

David Jubb, Artistic Director at Battersea Arts Centre, said of producing: “Beware of rationalists. Including yourself. Logical, sensible, well-considered trains of thought are fantastically seductive, especially because they are often right: do the sensible thing, take the path of righteousness, you know it makes sense. At key moments this is exactly the opposite of what you should do. The most important bit is looking after people and being generous with your time. I am at my best when I am helping someone else work something out. I am at my worst when I'm in danger of taking someone for granted. Great artists are like great scientists: inventors of the human spirit.”

I would be fascinated to know if these people exist in other sectors. I am embarking on a piece of work to look at what sort of environments allow these sorts of approaches/competencies to work better. They may or may not be innate competencies, but I can't help but believe that we can keep finding ways of enriching how good we are at them, and in turn keep looking for ways to make our responses to the 21st Century so much better than they were to the C20th.

Reflection

- 1 find a quiet place
- 2 direct your attention to your breathing - allow it gently to calm
- 3 allow a warm generous inward heart
- 4 reflect on your strengths and experience on one or more of the following
 - o innovative and conservative
 - o multiple truths held lightly
 - o lives, thinks and acts locally and globally
 - o embraces spirituality
 - o thinks holistically & systemically
 - o tolerates ambiguity & difference
 - o reflexive learner
 - o contextual 'self-in-process'
 - o ethics - right action over fixed principles
 - o assumes personal responsibility and accountability
 - o particularist and generalist
 - o reasons abstractly and narratively
 - o trusts physical intelligence
- 5 decide which needs attention, care and action
- 6 breathe let it be, enjoy the moment of calm being fully who you can be