
Addressing the Dynamic

Overview

Addressing the Dynamic was a small enquiry-based research project by Trinity Laban's Learning and Participation team. The project focused on the roles and skills of arts project managers working in participatory arts. There was a special emphasis on the relationship dynamic they have with participatory artists.

Trinity Laban worked with an independent facilitator to undertake this enquiry-based research project that asked what skills do managers need and what do artists want from managers to facilitate high quality participatory arts projects? The project considered what kind of professional development support managers might benefit from.

The project worked with 14 project managers, who met on two occasions, each full days. In between these two occasions the managers met with 10 artists separately for a half-day. Responses from both groups to similar questions were elicited and explored.

How the work sought to address the issue

The role of project managers in building effective relationships with participatory artists was identified as an issue. It is often overlooked and can be imperative to the success of arts in participatory settings.

Through a range of facilitated conversations the team sought to address this imbalance. The professional development needs of project managers working in the sector need to be highlighted. Addressing the Dynamic therefore asked the question: What skills do project managers need and what do artists want from project managers to ensure the facilitation of high quality participatory arts projects?

The project had a number of aims:

- To understand better the barriers and challenges that exist between artists and project managers in terms of management and relationship dynamic
- To highlight what artists and project managers expect from one another. This includes approaches, frameworks and models that can help establish and support positive working relationships
- To develop a greater understanding of how to facilitate and manage better professional relationships amongst the research project participants

- To develop a greater understanding amongst the project participants. This includes the misconceptions, assumptions and culture that exist about the relationship between artists and project managers
- To contribute to the debate in the sector around the needs of project managers. In particular their management of relationships with artists

What it achieved

Addressing the Dynamic successfully identified the key ingredients for developing effective working relationships.

It contributed to uncovering models, frameworks and core competencies that will assist project managers and artists in developing a better exchange.

Furthermore, project managers are often the essential link in a project's success. Yet their professional development is often overlooked. Their position as a 'broker', 'middle person' and 'supportive champion' means that they are often required to manage a range of complex situations. Project managers do this without formal training or support.

Lessons learned

Amongst other learning, the project has produced some key areas of focus for future CPD development for arts project managers.

- Project managers can often feel neglected and underappreciated
- Sharing with colleagues and peers can offer an effective model for CPD
- Cross art form collaboration and peer to peer learning are valuable learning approaches
- Many of the project manager participants agreed that it was great to reflect on their competencies. Another wished that they could be endorsed more for these competencies. The project managers felt that the complexity of their role and the need for them to possess a high level of skill was often undervalued
- Each relationship with an artist is different and innately personal
- Relationship building is a two way process. Artists have a responsibility for effectively working with project managers

There are clear frameworks and models that can be implemented in organisations and adopted by freelance project managers. These can support effective relationships with artists such as standard policies, models and procedures. The importance of clarity on roles and responsibilities and the need for time and space to build relationships were highlighted.

What other stakeholders are/should be doing with the learning

The project revealed some principles about developing learning approaches:

- The value of bringing together practice and experiences from different art form disciplines. Practitioners working in this area are likely to share sufficient common ground beyond disciplines to enable valuable affinities to emerge
- Bringing together a group of peers can help to validate the status of practitioners. It can build a sense that the particular skills and experiences of practitioners are recognised and valued
- Focused activity can help to build a network of peers which lasts beyond the period of the activity. These focused activities could be a series of workshops or facilitated enquiry days
- This suggests a significant appetite for activities exists, which can help to validate and develop a community or communities of practice in this area

Opportunities to share experiences from the artist and employer/commissioner side seem to be valuable. Potentially, such approaches benefit both sides and may affect both individual professional development as well as policy development within organisations.

It is clear that arts management undergraduate and postgraduate provision within HEIs could take on some of the learning about the importance of the project manager's role, particularly in ensuring that the conditions that support quality in participatory work are present.

There is also a need for funders to consider the importance of this relationship when funding projects. Is enough time for relationship building planned into the project? Will there be a division between people implementing the project and people who planned it? If so, are there plans to remedy this?

For artists and project managers the importance of two way dialogue is a clear finding that can be adopted. The reinforcement of learning around the importance of cross art form and peer to peer learning is also important.



Image: Participants in Trinity Laban's enquiry-based research, *Addressing the Dynamic*

What is happening with the learning now

The project did not seek to offer a particular model for future CPD, rather it tested the proposition that there is a need which should be addressed.

However, Trinity Laban Learning and Participation team are keen to take forward the learning and recommendations found through this research. The team is considering developing further provision to address the needs identified in the workshops.

Three important next steps were highlighted by the participants:

- Offer organisational teams consultancy/planning sessions on the issues raised in the report
- Fund and develop a relationship 'tool kit' resource to support project managers and artists
- Fund a more formal practical course for project managers based on the report findings

There is a distinct gap in professional development in this area that still needs to be filled.

More information:

Kate Atkinson

k.atkinson@trinitylaban.ac.uk

Wilmot, H (2014) *Addressing the Dynamic: A report of the findings*, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance