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SOCIAL POLICY, BELIEF AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ARTS

Comparing experiences of cultural leaders in Australia and the UK

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The following report presents findings of an exploratory, pilot qualitative study comparing the experiences of arts and cultural sector leaders in Australia and the UK in response to changing centre-left political climates and social policy objectives. Reflections on the UK New Labour experience and contemporaneous responses to Australian Labor Party policies add substance to the debate on social responsibility in publicly-funded cultural sectors and the conditions that underpin their contribution to political agendas. Using a thematic discourse analysis framework including interpretation and translation; communication and consultation; and accountability and action, the research has revealed that cultural leadership strategy and practice is inadvertently affected by leaders' own inherent belief systems within and across political, professional and social boundaries. The transient impact of political climates, including relative dimensions of optimism and fear, is also significant. This translates into three distinct emerging modes of [reactive and responsive] cultural leadership, including 'the campaigner', 'the defender' and 'the diplomat'.

Keywords: cultural leadership; social policy; instrumentalism; public services

Introduction

The general election in 1997 resulted in a rapidly changing political climate in the UK following 18 successive years of Conservative office, as the incoming New Labour government began a shift towards cohesive 'third way' social policy objectives with higher levels of responsibility and accountability afforded to all public services (Levitas, 2005). Recent political events in Australia are highly resonant of the UK post-1997 experience, as 10 years on in 2007 the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was elected to federal office following an 11 year centre-right Liberal Party reign. The ALP has been recorded as borrowing heavily from the third-way "mantra" of New Labour in the UK with regards to social policy and an explicit focus on social inclusion objectives (Marston, 2008). This comparative study explored the response of cultural leaders to the political mood of both nations, and their roles as gatekeepers and enablers in the relationship between social policy and arts and cultural sector professional practice.

The research was devised in response to contemporary themes of debate within cultural policy research, and of equal concern to arts professionals, concerning ubiquitous claims of ministerial intervention in cultural agency decision making and the role that cultural agencies are often required to play in augmenting government social policies. The broad aim of the research[1] therefore was to capture a political experience and 'moment in time' from contemporary and reflective perspectives, with a particular focus on cultural sector leaders. Within this context, the research sought to explore the impact of political environments and circumstances, including their significance to leaders' professional identities and organisational objectives.

Specifically, the study was designed to profile the comparative impact of social policy on cultural leaders' strategy and practice from international perspectives, relating to:

- Engagement with contemporary politics;
- Transference of policy into leadership practice;
- Tensions and opportunities in policy agendas;
- Implications for professional identity and values.

This was achieved using a purely qualitative approach. A total of 12 semi-structured interviews were held with leaders of a range of publicly-funded arts and cultural organisations (6 in UK and 6 in Australia), representing a variety of sub-sectors including contemporary [visual] arts; dance; museums; music education; theatre; and libraries. Selected organisations also varied in size and urban location. For the purposes of this project, cultural leaders are defined as those with strategic responsibility for arts and cultural organisations – participants in the study for example held Director positions or were responsible for the strategic leadership of significant departments, services or cultural/artistic programmes. For a full description of the research sample, including job title, organisational type and funding streams, and urban location, please see **table 1**. In the interests of participant confidentiality, individuals, organisations and locations are not named in the report.

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[1] Fieldwork undertaken July – December 2009

Australian Cultural Leaders				
Interviewee Tag	**Role**	**Organisational type**	**Funding**	**Location type**
Australia a	Director	Multi-arts venue	City Council; Supported by sponsors/commercial partners	City suburb
Australia b	Director	Contemporary arts gallery	State Government; Australia Council; Supported by sponsors/commercial partners	City centre
Australia c	Director	Regional dance agency	State Government; Supported by sponsors/commercial partners	City suburb
Australia d	Senior Curator	National museum	Commonwealth Government	City centre
Australia e	Executive Manager	State library	State Government	City centre
Australia f	Director	Theatre	City Council; Supported by sponsors/commercial partners	City suburb
UK Cultural Leaders				
Interviewee Tag	**Role**	**Organisational type**	**Funding**	**Location type**
UK a	Executive Director	National museum	National Government	City centre
UK b	Regional Executive Officer	Regional music agency	Arts Council England; Supported by sponsors/commercial partners	City suburb
UK c	Director	Multi-arts venue	City Council; Arts Council England; Supported by sponsors/commercial partners	City centre
UK d	Head of Learning	Contemporary arts gallery	National Government	City centre
UK e	Executive Director	Theatre	Arts Council England; City Council	City centre
UK f	Head of Service Development	Public library	Borough Council	Urban town

Table 1 – description of research sample

The research instrument [interview questions] was designed to provide a flexible conversational structure exploring:

- Leaders' interpretations of contemporary political landscapes (local, regional and national);
- Relative personal and professional responses to political landscapes;
- Perceived leadership roles in relation to policy agendas;
- Sector conditions for effective policy engagement;
- Professional, cultural, and artistic implications in relation to sector identity and values.

A qualitative approach was considered essential in order to consider the complexities of the relationship between policy and practice, and to add authority and authenticity to the research and emerging leadership discourse via the collection of detailed, autobiographical professional narratives (Riessman, 1993; Robson, 2002). Conversations were held in person with each lasting approximately 90 minutes, recorded, fully transcribed and analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software according to a thematic node structure. Such rigorous discourse analysis, and

of leaders' own social construction of their worlds, enables a greater exploration of the 'pragmatic function of language' and how talking translates into doing (Wood and Kroger, 2000). The interview method therefore is useful for research in professional environments, which seeks to determine relationships and patterns in vocational behaviours and actions.

The research is potentially of wider methodological interest to qualitative researchers in the cultural and social policy fields, by illustrating the usefulness of pilot investigations and preliminary interviewing in testing the relevance of a research inquiry and relative effectiveness of the chosen approach. The process of piloting is frequently recommended from a technical point of view – to test for clarity, ambiguity, lucidity of interview questions and structure for example (Arksey and Knight, 1999) – but it also enables a test-bed for the more philosophical condition of trust and related dimensions of quality in qualitative research (Seale, 1999). Whilst broader generalizations from pilot data cannot (or rather should not) be made, the identification and dissemination of initial, headline findings as discussed in this report are helpful in framing and validating ongoing empirical investigations and developing confidence in the wider topic and field of interest.

A brief discussion of research context and a summary of selected findings, including verbatim quotations, are presented below. UK cultural leaders, in anticipation of a general election in 2010, already perceived the post-1997 New Labour administration as the 'halcyon days' for the arts and public responsibility, whilst some Australian leaders saw ALP agendas as a window of opportunity to lobby for the sector and its social significance. Leaders demonstrated differing reactions and responses to changing policy agendas, which translate into emerging 'modes' of leadership practice. Relative implications are discussed throughout, including conditions for compatibility, compliance and conformity in policy agendas and public sector performance; choice and [predisposed] accountability in cultural and public sector professionalism; subsequent realism in enforced instrumentalism of the arts and cultural sectors; and operational implications relating to recruitment, training and development in cultural sector leadership.

UK context – reflecting on New Labour

Social policy in post-1997 Britain reflected a cohesive cross-sector approach to social inclusion-led objectives, which saw significantly higher levels of responsibility and accountability afforded to all public services, with respect to accessibility, service standards, performance indicators and the need to prove social value and impact (Percy-Smith, 2000). This included publicly-funded arts and cultural organisations – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's corporate plan *Living Life to the Full* (DCMS, 2005) asserted the primary goals of promoting diversity, community action and personal freedom, via increased and sustained funding to the arts, sport, cultural and voluntary organisations. The DCMS at the time of undertaking this research complied with 30 cross-government Public Service Agreements (PSAs), as specified by the Comprehensive Spending Review - PSA targets for DCMS included increasing the take-up of cultural opportunities (such as attending arts events/accessing museums and galleries) by adults and young people aged 16+ from 'priority groups' (DCMS, 2005, pp. 52).

During a large scale public consultation on the value of the arts in England, a number of perceived responsibilities of publicly-funded arts organisations were identified (Keaney et al, 2007), including 'the responsibility to ensure that both the art and the organisation are accessible and inclusive, the importance of reaching out to those who would not normally engage with the arts and the importance of ensuring diversity and equality in the kind of work the organisation supports, the types of artists that they work with and the way that they treat staff and the public' (pp. 7). Throughout consecutive New Labour terms of office from 1997 to 2010, there was undoubtedly a heightened awareness and conscientiousness within the UK arts and cultural sectors with respect to their social impact – this has been evidenced by the marked increase in evaluation of services and products and drive to demonstrate such impact (Jermyn, 2001; Galoway, 2008). Belfiore and Bennett (2008) warn however that policy agendas have blurred the boundaries between advocacy and research, with studies commissioned to 'find' the evidence to support certain claims rather than objectively appraise what is available.

Australia context – adjusting to ALP ethos

Social inclusion as a core social policy objective has similarly featured strongly in Australian politics since the ALP came to power in 2007. In the positioning document A Stronger Fairer Australia, the government's social inclusion strategy is defined as a means of 'building a nation in which all Australians have the opportunity and support they need to participate fully in the nation's economic and community life, develop their own potential and be treated with dignity and respect' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Specific approaches in making the strategy operational include prioritising early intervention and prevention, delivering localised, tailored 'joined-up' services and evidence-informed policy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

A cross-sector approach and 'joined-up' thinking was symbolised by the Australia 2020 Summit, which took place 19-20 April 2008: this facilitated a democratic, inclusive discussion amongst 1000+ Australians on a long-term strategy for the nation's social priorities and included 'Towards a creative Australia—the future of the arts, film and design' as a discussion point (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The response from arts, cultural and creative practitioners to such an explicit inclusion in the political mainstream was one of optimism, gratitude, pride and ambition (O'Neil et al, 2009). Plans for a national Cultural Policy to 2020 were furthermore launched in October 2009, reflecting the arts' contribution to learning, self-fulfilment, communities, the economy, social and cultural identity (Garrett, 2009). Previous research on the role and function of arts leadership in Australia (Johanson and Rentschler, 2002) discusses a trend in reflecting the changing pace of the Australian cultural sector, which mirrors patterns of development in countries with similar traditions, and changes taking place in wider public sector leadership and administration. If this trend is to continue, there is potentially much to be gained by Australian cultural leaders in observing and considering the New Labour experiences of their UK counterparts.

The cultural sector and social inclusion policy

An explicit relationship between the arts and social impact is not of course a recent phenomenon, and has long been the source of debate and the focus of cultural policy research. Belfiore and Bennett (2008) trace the intellectual history of positioning the arts as a 'transformative' catalyst for individuals and societies. The intellectual history described is centred on the intrinsic versus instrumental value of the arts, which according to authors has been 'played out particularly strongly' in Britain under New Labour. Academics and policy commentators became increasingly critical of the government's instrumental manipulation of the arts to achieve social policy objectives and New Labour's vision, in neglect of 'the full range of values expressed by culture'.

Similarly arts practitioners and professionals have been resistant to instrumental policies. Newman and McLean (2004) observe that the *potential* of museums and galleries to influence individuals and communities is often discussed with no real consideration of *what* can be done and achieved by cultural and heritage organisations, and their true capacity to deliver. This is reiterated by West and Smith (2005), who observe that various definitions of social exclusion given in policy rhetoric are unhelpful in seeking to understand what constitutes socially inclusive practice. This seems more achievable when interpreted as improving access to arts and culture via reconsidering interpretation strategies (Rees Leahy, 2007); social inclusion as a policy and practice is however considered to be much more complex and challenging than access or audience development objectives (Sandell, 2003). Confusion over what constitutes social inclusion policy and practice, and where cultural and creative practice 'fits' has been widespread (Oakley, 2006; McCall, 2009).

Gibson (2008) stresses that synthesis of the two is not impossible and that engagement with social policy must be grounded in the practicalities of culture's administration. The link therefore between policy-maker expectations and sector contribution, including its relative conditions, challenges and impact, is arguably made by cultural organisations, professionals and practitioners and their adopted values, practices and actions. Sandell (2003) advocates the need for people to be 'change catalysts' for new approaches to museums practice with 'new attitudes and competencies'. Previous research undertaken with the public library service in England (Wilson and Birdi, 2008) revealed serious strategic and operational human resource limitations with respect to the service's engagement with social inclusion objectives. Hewison (2004) described a crisis in cultural leadership as a 'crisis of cultural values' – the research summarised in this report sought to examine more closely the relationship between cultural leaders' values and leadership practice, and their role as 'change catalysts' within social policy agendas.

Research findings

The following analytical framework for the research has been developed through the data analysis process, based on consistent emerging and recurring themes or factors:

- *Translation and interpretation*: including the extent to which policy agendas (their purpose and value) are evaluated, understood and accepted by cultural leaders.

- *Consultation and communication*: including the extent to which policy agendas are effectively shared, discussed, and debated by cultural leaders.

- *Accountability and action*: including the extent to which responsibility is taken and acted upon amongst cultural leaders.

A selection of key findings is presented and discussed under these three headings as follows:

Cultural leaders' 'translation and interpretation' of social policy agendas

The concerns reflected in the literature on the cultural sector and social impact with respect to how policy translates to practice were felt to a certain degree by research participants, particularly in relation to the role of rhetoric within social policy agendas. Despite criticism aimed at policy-makers, the arts and cultural sectors can be similarly guilty of creating their own rhetoric, which can have positive and negative implications. Some sector-led rhetoric can be misleading, counter-productive and lack constructive direction, for which cultural leaders are responsible. There is also a sense that social policy objectives can become 'lost in translation' when discussed at sector level, and the point at which they become, or are discussed as funding opportunities. Here cultural leaders can 'lose sight' of social purpose and become too focused on how current practices, services and programmes can 'fit in'. Where cultural leaders identify quite closely with social policy in relation to their own beliefs and inclinations, they must be conscious of the extent to which these are communicated to avoid 'soap-boxing' and be seen to provide objective direction:

> "We have enormous amounts of self-serving advice in the arts with a lack of clear direction – we don't need endless documentation just good conversations, and people leading arts organisations need to take some responsibility for that" (Australia a)

> "We as individuals, as citizens, as parents… think we know about [social] policy but focus too much in the sector on policy in terms of funding decisions, where the money is coming from, how to get it… we lose sight of the origins and why we should be doing things… everything becomes over operationalised" (UK b)

> "Sometimes I have to keep my [political] convictions to myself or I could deter people. I need to be diplomatic nationally; regionally it's easier to retain my own allegiances and identity, to be candid, transparent... It's about pragmatic politics" (UK e)

Leaders regard themselves as having two main organisational (and sometimes sector-wide) roles and functions when interpreting and translating policy agendas. The first of these is the role of 'enabler'. This requires a proactive engagement with policy agendas, and the ability and willingness to 'manage up' where relevant with policy-makers, governors and regional stakeholders. The motivation here is to enable the arts and cultural organisations to play an active part in social policy and to influence peers and stakeholders. The second role is that of 'mediator', which is much more tentative and although mediators demonstrate a willingness and ability to discuss policy agendas with peers, they are more mindful of what this means practically for the organisation and people within it, and will adapt their own translation and interpretation of policy accordingly. Both roles are influenced and informed by leaders' own knowledge of and belief in policy to begin with:

> "It's my job to influence media, politicians... It's a technique for survival... To challenge notions of art for the elite. I'd say I'm political with a small p and it's totally about ethical orientation and standards" (Australia b)

> "I'm more inclined to engage with policy at an authority level, even at a level of just talking about it… with [staff] in the organisation less so, I have to present it in different ways, they need to know what it means for them" (UK a)

The extent to which policy translates into practice has been helped considerably in the UK through collaboration with other public and social services (a practice also emerging in Australia). Daly (2005) advocates the need for professional communities of cross-sector practice to deliver community objectives – this is achieved through partnership working with other agencies and service providers on a project basis or by other more sustainable delivery mechanisms such as shared premises and staff recruitment policies. Cultural leaders do not in these contexts have to 're-invent the wheel' for cultural and artistic practice – a recurring tension in the literature. New challenges are raised however from a 'translation and interpretation' perspective, as collaborators have to reach shared and agreed objectives, with a mutual awareness of and respect for each other's professional practices and conventions. Other examples of collaboration include a regional arts leadership consortium, which was established as a (somewhat defensive) response to changing local politics and as a means of ensuring cultural representation within local decision-making processes:

> "The cultural plan for the city was not strong enough to survive personnel changes in council leadership... [regional consortium] emerged as a reactive response and as a voice for publicly-funded arts organisations... It's gradually become more proactive in spite of city council" (UK d)

> "Hardcore [socially excluded] groups are chaotic and transient, the infrastructure needs to be right and we rely on multi-agency working... This requires empathy on both sides and shared agendas mean we learn from each other... We have trained youth workers working in the gallery which works well, but there can be a miss-match with some agencies" (UK d)

Cultural leaders' 'consultation and communication' in social policy agendas

In relation to the extent to which social policy is communicated with and by cultural leaders, and the levels of consultation that take place, explicit, open inclusion in national initiatives, debate and events acts as a positive driver and confidence-boost for leaders and as the first real point of engagement. Each Australian leader involved in the study for example commented on the 2020 Summit, which has had a clear motivating impact and has been highly valued as a signal from the ALP government about how it regards arts and culture and those working within the sector. Similarly when reflecting on the New Labour experience, UK cultural leaders towards the end of 2009 were already feeling nostalgic about the visible prominence given to the arts and culture, a sense of equality and equity of opportunity generated across public services and a sense that in terms of communication and consultation, the sector had 'never had it so good':

> "The 2020 Summit was a fantastic opportunity, to have access to ministers...
> We'll see what [long-term] impact it has, but it involved better briefing, better
> lobbying and not about chasing funding but changing attitudes" (Australia b)

> "It's hitting home how good we've had it… not even necessarily from a funding
> or wealth perspective, but from the platform we've had… a level playing field
> with other art forms… [with] education, and health… or more level than it's been
> before… with real opportunities to provide complementary services on an equal
> footing… there's been a real momentum in the [sector] and it will be so damaging
> to lose that " (UK c)

At a regional level, communication and consultation becomes more complex and potentially demanding on cultural leaders. A key finding is the level of opportunism that exists at regional levels, with leaders indicating that it has been or is possible to be in the 'right place at the right time'. In this context, geopolitics has a role in social policy agendas and can affect levels of momentum within the cultural sector. Leaders in both Australia and the UK mentioned the impact of regeneration areas in creating increased opportunities for arts and culture. This creates tensions between leaders 'lucky enough' to be part of those areas and those who work in areas that are not targeted regeneration zones and are not seen as a developmental priority by policy-makers. In the UK, other initiatives such as Liverpool's European Capital of Culture award in 2008 have placed a greater emphasis on the contribution of arts and culture to socio-economic regeneration, and although not a direct New Labour influence, will always be associated with this period:

> "[local council] is very progressive and leaders in progressing the arts, it's a low-
> socio economic area with several arts organisations... Other councils are not so
> great with cultural planning so we have regional centres emerging depending on
> [social] priorities" (Australia c)

> "[Liverpool 08] has shown that culture has a part to play in economic
> development… be it tourism, be it job creation… and that's made the civil
> servants sit up and take notice… social outcomes may be a nice side-effect to
> them but what makes us tick" (UK e)

The layers of governance and bureaucracy that exist at a regional level can create communication and consultation problems for cultural leaders. This was especially true for Australian participants, who felt challenged by 'mixed messages' emerging from federal and state government relating to national, state and regional objectives. It was felt that arts and culture are often used as a 'political football' by different government representatives, and that arts and cultural organisations themselves are often guilty of the same thing when trying to respond to different agendas. The core message was that Australian cultural leaders were very much at the beginning of negotiating their new socio-political relevance:

> "There doesn't appear to me to be a common purpose between the two [federal/state] as yet... In [state] I'd say we have no apparent social policy in relation to the arts, and it's becoming less rather than more clear... We have some highly competent individuals but no consistency across the board" (Australia a)

At a local level, leaders referred to the need for internal communication and consultation and that (some not all) arts organisations invariably needed a 'generational change' linked to social policy and impact. Such culture shifts were the only examples of 'communicating down' or lateral consultation – most cultural leaders instinctively described a 'managing up' process when talking about communication and consultation. Generational changes include required shifts in organisational culture, changes to programmes and audiences, and a perceived leadership need to generate and encourage collective responsibility and commitment. It is at this level of consultation and communication that personal beliefs become more explicit – whereas they are often tempered when communicating with senior peers and governors, beliefs are communicated more strongly and are used to motivate and judge others within organisations:

> "It's about courage of conviction and rising above closing gates both internally and externally... [arts sub-sector] can be its own worst enemy" (Australia c)

> "If you don't believe in the mission why work here?! You can't change peoples' belief systems... People who don't [believe] don't last long" (UK d)

Cultural leaders' 'accountability and action' in social policy agendas

As anticipated when designing a sampling strategy for the project, there is a certain tension between organisational obligation and genuine commitment within publicly funded cultural organisations. All leaders recognise and acknowledge that their organisations are obliged to contribute to social policy because of their funding status. They furthermore link the *authenticity* of their contribution to their own values and social priorities, and to the established public service ethos of the organisation. Arts and cultural organisations with a long-standing culture of social responsibility, as directed by leaders who share that orientation, are more responsive and predisposed to social impact. Where that culture is embedded, there is less pressure on the leader as an individual (as less inclined to lead a 'generational change'). Organisational contributions that are considered to be less authentic are made under obligation where there is no existing cultural commitment, and can be damaging to the sector's political reputation:

"It's an obligation of the job to engage communities – they're paying for it" (Australia a)

"We're not all cut out for it and there's a lot of simmering resentment towards those in the sector that are seen to be 'doing well' out of politically-led agendas… the [project] programme is a perfect example… I've heard quite senior people say 'but what are we supposed to do if we don't want to work with kids?'... moaning that all funding opportunities involve kids or schools and they're not interested… but it's the type of work we have always done… we're not manipulating anything to get the money" (UK b)

"The sector has developed a need to please, and this can result in scoring points on people's futures for political gain" (UK e)

Where leaders do take individual responsibility for social policy agendas, there are certain conditions for proactive engagement that are intrinsically linked to their own social conscience, political orientation and professional accountability. Proactive leaders are very mindful of their own reputation and credibility, and feel a strong need to be taken seriously by politicians, governors, peers and staff [direct reports] alike. They are politically engaged in this context, and believe in taking accountable action. They have an intrinsic care for social objectives which motivated their political engagement. The proactive leader expects and anticipates a reward and positive impact for their efforts linked to their own profile and that of their organisations, including increased personal job satisfaction, internal staff morale and external organisational credibility:

"We've had years of complacency on part of the arts sector and it's as much the arts' fault as it is the politicians'... We've operated in silos... Now we have an opportunity for change" (Australia b)

"I see elitism as a form of discrimination and take job satisfaction from trying to change that" (Australia c)

Not all cultural leaders share this enthusiasm for and confidence in political engagement. This affects the way that collective arts and cultural sectors contribute to social policy and demonstrate their contribution where appropriate. Some cultural leaders spoke of an inclination to defend their artistic or professional values when discussing the role of the arts and culture in social agendas. This is especially true for those working in a specialist field that requires a commitment to training, development, professional membership and unique forms of skill and expertise. The issue here is not a typical 'instrumental versus intrinsic' value argument – leaders do not simply defend their professional practice on aesthetic art-for art's-sake terms, but seek to defend *themselves* as having a right to their own professional identity and practices:

"I've been working in [artistic field] for 20 years… and yes I want as many people as possible to enjoy [art form] and engage with it, but at the same time I still want to develop what I do, to experiment, to take risks, I want [organisation] to be at the cutting edge" (Australia a)

> "In some cases we might as well be social workers, or classroom learning assistants, or youth workers… the expectations of what [we] can suddenly do or be called on to deliver are completely unrealistic compared to the qualifications we have, experience we've built up and what we have the confidence to do… some of just want to do the day job" (UK f)

Issues of performance and accountability in relation to social outcomes remain therefore relatively haphazard. Despite the culture of evaluation in the UK sector, confidence and aptitude for not just demonstrating but predicting impact remains low. Leaders' own levels of accountability are linked to their self-image and professional identity, which causes inconsistency across the board:

> "All funding applications now require an indication of what socio-economic impact you will have, not necessarily just bums-on-seats, but predicting that and demonstrating that you've achieved it are two different things... Whether you can and do demonstrate it sometimes depends on your own conscientiousness and we need to get much, much better at that to prove our worth in the future" (UK d)

> "Professionally, personally, politically I am intrinsically linked to the performance of this organisation and therefore want it to be the best it can be" (UK c)

Implications for cultural leadership strategy and practice

The research as a whole has revealed how the comparative political experiences of cultural leaders from two different nations have impacted upon their professional values and perspective. UK cultural leaders describe how the sector has experienced high visibility and renewed social relevance post-1997. Multi-agency working has been a common, sustainable feature: New Labour policy has been a catalyst for this in relation to the 'joined-up thinking' consistently advocated by cross-government departments. Emerging forms of collective and collaborative leadership in some cases has presented a 'united front' in campaigning for the sector and its social value.

Authenticity however, and the dangers of a 'tick box' culture are challenges in policy agendas, which are inadvertently affected by leaders' own political, social and ethical orientations. UK cultural leaders at the time of research fieldwork in late 2009 were nervous about a return to (an anticipated) Conservative government in 2010 and subsequent neglect of the instrumental value of arts and culture – this was perceived as a real threat of 'undoing all the good work' achieved by the sector under a New Labour government. Although some critics may challenge a 'cause and effect' relationship between these factors and New Labour policy (arguing that instrumentalist approaches to cultural policy have always existed), research participants made a clear connection with the renewed social relevance described and their own experiences of the New Labour administration.

In comparison, cultural leaders in Australia were very much at the beginning of a process of realigning their professional practice with core political messages. There was a clear opportunity for the sector to re-define itself post-2007. The high impact 2020 Summit had set new levels of optimism, and arguably set a benchmark for cultural leaders' expectations from federal and state politicians and social policy. The relationship between the two was blurred by 'mixed messages' or a lack of clarity on 'role of the arts' and expectations of the sector under an ALP administration. There

were certain environmental issues affecting mixed levels of confidence and/or reticence amongst cultural leaders e.g. relationship between state governance and regional priorities. Those organisations with an established culture of social responsibility, and with leaders willing and able to represent those interests, were at the vanguard of arts and culture participation in Australian social policy agendas.

The research has subsequently revealed three emerging modes of leadership, linked to reactive and responsive leadership practices informed by leaders' own inherent belief systems. These are described as 'modes' of leadership as they are not fixed and can be attributed to any one individual leader at any one point in time depending on circumstance and situated conditions. Conventional 'models' of leadership as discussed by Burns and Wilson (2010) infer less malleable leadership styles that are rooted in personality and behavioural traits, or are more specifically defined by the situation in which they occur. Modes of leadership practice as informed by ethical belief systems can be adopted when a leader wishes to support what they believe to be the 'right thing' and the morally correct way to represent their personal and organisational interests. This is strongly inferred by pilot data, and will be explored in greater depth throughout ongoing research linked to this paper.

Emerging modes of leadership are defined as:

The campaigner: The campaigning cultural leader is willing and able to lobby for the sector and its instrumental value; is politically engaged; plays an enabling role; is driven by social outcomes and contribution above all else.

The defender: The defending cultural leader is more likely to defend the intrinsic value of arts and culture; is professionally engaged; is driven by artistic integrity and professional identity above all else.

The diplomat: The diplomatic cultural leader leads reactively in the interests of the organisation; is operationally engaged and pragmatic; plays a mediatory role; is driven by managerialism and organisational performance above all else.

In summary

The pilot research project discussed in this paper, and any ongoing research emanating from its findings, are not intended as a politically correct crusade to expose professional weaknesses and dictate how cultural sector practitioners and leaders should think and act in relation to social policy and political agendas. The researcher is interested in testing the realism of social policy contribution and the instrumental agenda, in a way that is not necessarily about the art or cultural form, but about the experience of working in the arts and cultural sectors, and of the contribution that the cultural workforce makes as the significant link between policy and practice. The research has so far enabled a preliminary exploration of issues surrounding the conditions for compatibility, compliance and/or conformity in policy agendas and public sector performance, including the extent to which those leading the sector choose to engage, and are predisposed to social accountability and public sector professionalism. There are significant strategic and operational implications raised as to the effective recruitment, training and development of cultural sector leaders, based on their skills and aptitude for the emerging core leadership practices of translation and interpretation, communication and consultation, accountability and action.

Since the completion of the pilot project, a Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government has been formed in the UK (from May 2010), whereas the ALP narrowly formed a minority administration as a result of the last Australian general election in September 2010. It is currently difficult to discern contemporary UK social policy objectives, as all policy is shrouded in a seemingly ideological, austerity-driven priority to reduce public spending. In a pre-election conference speech, the now Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport made a passing reference to an 'important social function for the arts' (Hunt, 2010), whereas the 'vision' communicated by the department's latest business plan (DCMS, 2010) uses phrases such as "...we want our sector to drive their own agenda... We will play our part in building the Big Society... Funding should not be an excuse for dependence", suggesting a certain 'disconnect' between the government's social expectations of arts and culture and their support for those delivering them.

This could be the ultimate test for the 'campaigner' cultural leader in driving their own social policy agendas in the UK whilst counterparts in the Australian arts and cultural sector seek to make the most of prominent political inclusion and social relevance while it lasts. There are leadership lessons and considerable research insights to be drawn from the ongoing political experiences of cultural leaders in both the UK and Australia – a shared international dialogue is recommended and encouraged.

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