The Real Work of Innovation: New Practices for a New Era in the Arts

Chorus America Leadership Development Forum – Saturday, January 12th, 2013
Portland Art Museum

Object Stories
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

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

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

SUSTAINED PUBLIC IMPACT + VALUE
Four organizational conditions

NEEDING MOMENTUM
- Relatively Stable
- Challenged to Adapt

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

SHOWING LITTLE VALUE
- Relatively Unstable
- Challenged to Adapt

PROMISING POTENTIAL
- Relatively Unstable
- Likely to Be Able to Adapt

STABILITY

ADAPTABILITY
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
Describing a Complex Challenge, with a Technical Solution

✧ **Strengthen Marketing.**
   “Because subscriptions are down and people are booking closer to the event, *we therefore need to offer them better incentives to commit to the season in advance.*”

✧ **Do more building repairs…..**
   “Because our campus is old, confusing and inefficiently used, *we therefore need to invest in upgrading facilities and signage.*”

✧ **We need to Raise more Money!**
   “As our expenses continue to grow faster than our income, and we experience persistent annual losses, *so we must generate more income and implement stronger cost controls.*”
Describing a Complex Challenge, with an Adaptive Response

✧ **Strengthen Marketing.**
  “Because subscriptions are down and people are booking closer to the event, we therefore need a completely different pricing system and to build loyalty through direct participation.”

✧ **Do more building repairs...**
  “Because our campus is old, confusing and inefficiently used, we therefore need to leverage our off-campus successes into a new kind of home.”

✧ **We need to Raise more Money!**
  “As our expenses continue to grow faster than our income, and we experience persistent annual losses, so we must overcome our increasing aversion to risk.”
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?
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
1. What assumptions underlying your work are you now beginning to question?

2. What evidence contradicts your old assumptions?

3. What “adaptive challenges” would you say your organization is facing?
   ✧ **Challenges that have persisted despite trying lots of strategies to address them**
   ✧ **And where there’s no expert to turn to**
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, WolfBrown
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
- Offer new gateways to participation
- Move from marketing to engagement

Connecting within our Organizations

- Collaborate or merge
- Build critical mass

Connecting across Organizations

Connecting with Communities

Move from marketing to engagement
New Structures for New Times, or

*What Innovation is beginning to look like in Practice*
Mission

Artistic Direction

Creative Capacity

Organizational Boundaries

Staffing

Financial Profile

Governance

Marketing

From Old to Emerging Approaches
From Old to Emerging Approaches

MISSION

ARTISTIC DIRECTION

FINANCIAL PROFILE

ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES

MARKETING

STAFFING

organizational outputs and achievements

community impacts and value
MISSION
ARTISTIC DIRECTION
CREATIVE CAPACITY
FINANCIAL PROFILE
GOVERNANCE
STAFFING
MARKETING
ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES

singular, handled by insiders

dialogue with external voices
From Old to Emerging Approaches

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

Creative capacity: highly selective, formally separate, seasonal

Creative community working together
From Old to Emerging Approaches

strong, differentiated from others + community

loose, porous, emphasizing commonalities

MISSION

FINANCIAL

MARKETING

STAFFING

ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES
From Old to Emerging Approaches

hierarchical departments, technical specialties

post-specialists in art-centered teams
From Old to Emerging Approaches

- 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
Hammer Museum, UC Los Angeles

Public Engagement Artists-in-Residence
Denver Center Theatre Company

Off-Center at The Jones
Systematizing
Innovation
“Not-for-profits should embrace innovation as a permanent part of their core competencies....”

“...A rational organizational process with its own distinct set of procedures, practices, and tools.”

Kellogg Foundation report, 2008: Intentional Innovation
EmcArts programs

The Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts
✧ 26 organizations to date in seven 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 Framework for Innovation

1. Identify an adaptive challenge
2. Question existing assumptions
3. Create an Innovation Team
4. Develop innovative strategies
5. Strengthen adaptive capacities
6. Use a project “Accelerator”
7. Execute and assess prototypes
8. Enroll others and build commitment

Circular process: Identify challenge → Question assumptions → Create team → Develop strategies → Strengthen capacities → Use Accelerator → Execute prototypes → Enroll others → Question assumptions → Identify challenge
A “Lab” framework to incubate innovation projects

4 months

- Develop the Team
- Gather data
- Test and discard ideas

Phase 1: Research and Focus

1 week

- Decide
- Build momentum
- Plan for re-entry

Phase 2: Project Accelerator

4 - 6 months

- Enroll others
- Try out the innovation
- Evaluate and refine

Phase 3: Prototyping And Evaluating
The Sequence of New Pathways

Year 1
1  2  3  4  5  6

Year 2

WORKSHOPS

ONSITE COACHING

INCUBATING INNOVATION

SYSTEMS ANALYSIS WORK

ARTSFWD DOCUMENTATION AND LEARNING
Trajectory of adaptive team dynamics

- ADAPTIVE POTENTIAL
- LEVEL OF AGREEMENT

- High
- Low

- BREAKTHROUGH
- COMPROMISE
- ABDICATION
- STALEMATE

HEAT
A platform for sharing and learning

ArtsFwd is a new place for leaders in the sector to share and learn about adaptive strategies and the power of effective innovation. Learn more.
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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