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CHAPTER THREE

THE SEARCH FOR 'GOOD WORK' IN AN OVEREXTENDED SECTOR

The point:

- *Covid and lockdown have revealed what was there already: an over-extended, under-capitalised sector operating in highly contradictory times and environments*
- *The unequal opportunities and conditions of the workforce matter because they affect who gets to make culture*
- *Much of the cultural sector has been, in many ways, already operating in the precarious future of work*
- *A lack of focus on workforce diversity and development by employers, boards and recruitment panels is exacerbated by a lack of inclusive, supportive working cultures leading to socially narrow entry and progression*
- *Networks and collaborative efforts are potential tipping points or levers for change*

Some questions:

- *Where do you sit in this picture and for what or whom are you responsible, or connected to?*
- *How could you use your position, knowledge or networks to create opportunities for 'good work', for yourself and others?*
- *How would you reduce over-extension within the cultural sector as you experience it?*

Waking up to contradictory times

I can still picture the stack of letters. I was working as a poet and arts worker in community settings at the time, “trying to make two short ends meet”. (As I said in a poem from the time, entitled, subtly, ‘Struggling’.) I spent most of my time running between community and adult education centres, schools, prisons and libraries. I edited magazines and newsletters, in the days and nights of Desktop Publishing. I got home with my wife and two small children from visiting her sister (our holiday that year) to a pile of envelopes on the mat. In amongst the poetry rejections and bills were several letters from the bank, informing me of cheques and payments they had bounced while we had been away. By the time I’d opened them all we were further in the red than ever and I had a suspicion Something Must Be Done. We

couldn't even sell the car, as it was an ancient, leaking £250 tank of an Austin Princess bought from a neighbour who had grown too old to drive. What happened next is too long and personal a story, but it involves juggling low interest credit cards for years, reassessing priorities and what I was capable of, and the continuing search for balance.

For the cultural sector, the Covid-19 crisis has served the same function as that wake up call. It has revealed something there already: a dangerous set of pre-existing conditions, including over-extension of individuals, organisations and funders; too many people working over capacity, stretching people and resources too thin; massive inequality in who gets to make work, and who takes part or enjoys it. Unfair pay differentials between chief executives and zero hours staff in large organisations. Large parts of the country and population paid only lip service by those with resources and platforms. These things have not just arrived, they have been well-documented. Covid-19, as in the areas of health and poverty, has drawn big, bold lines around them so they are – for most, anyway – harder to ignore.

I want to start by considering the conditions in the sector that mean we must think about how to build creative resilience and sustainable livelihoods, and how the sector needs to change so people can do and enjoy good work in healthy conditions.

I first developed a picture of the operating environment long before Covid, in a provocation paper for The Bluecoat in Liverpool, which by happy coincidence was the first arts centre I ever loved, when I was a student. I proposed then, and would maintain now, after the changes wrought by the pandemic, that we work not in troubled or challenging times but in *contradictory* times, which makes everything more complex. When I hear people talk of troubled times (pandemic aside) I wonder where they have been, as the times have always been troubled for some groups of people. That didn't start with the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Troubled times suggests privileged, narrow horizons.

If we lived in a simple, peaceful, harmonious world, without pandemics and financial crashes, would cultural work be straightforward? I very much doubt it. Cultural and creative work expresses itself in countless ways. It finds its necessary homes via countless routes. It takes shape in and from the individuals and teams that make and share its results. It is a voice or band of

voices, an atmosphere, an argument, a composition emerging over lifetimes, as well as programmes, plans and budgets. It isn't always smooth or graceful. But it echoes. Resonates.

The forces shaping cultural work and leadership in the UK are high-tension and often contradictory currents in politics, people, work, technology, business and education. Each brings both opportunity and damage, abundance and want. Creative work in this context is neither a simple set of tasks or skills, nor a complicated set of interrelated actions and projects. Instead, it is ever more concerned with complex problems, where solutions and results are unpredictable, and bringing together many imaginations and perspectives is a core skill.

Digital technology has also encouraged co-creation and collaboration, especially during the Covid pandemic. Artists, makers and audiences are increasingly joint participants in what happens or is made. Some libraries, arts centres, theatres and galleries are evolving into (or back into) shared spaces for everyday creativity, play and making. They are homes for ideas, creative people and tools, from 3D printers to stages. People integrate creative activity into their everyday lives, although they may not call it Art or Culture. We make films, books, music on objects in our pockets, the means of production and distribution in all our hands. Recorded music and film, new and historical, are available to people at the click of a button, often free or at very low cost, but in ways that have shattered business models and left artists struggling financially. Digital technology has transformed processes from buying a ticket to enjoying a performance at national theatres and opera houses, changing what people demand in terms of information and access. Covid has deepened this, with more people engaging online, though some long for touch, for a crowded venue. However, it may also worsen the divides between the engaged and otherwise-engaged. Research suggests lockdown has meant that those most likely to engage in the arts have both more time and more money, whilst those groups least likely to engage have less time *and* less money.¹

This conflicted flourishing was happening, even pre-pandemic. It was the companion of unease, of gentrification, poverty and exclusion. It donned bright statistics of great wealth and high levels of growth in the creative industries, to argue for Treasury support. Despite policy consensus on the benefits of a more diverse sector, some groups of people continue to dominate

and others continue to be under-represented. Changes to school curricula and to higher education, tightening of the benefits system, and narrowing of routes into the workforce due to reductions in public funding, are affecting people without middle class family support. This mirrors growing equality gaps in many areas of society. These are especially important to the arts given how gender, education, disability and class affect engagement, participation and who progresses within the sector.

A more personalised or privatised society fuels inequality, reshaping public spaces and private expenditure. People now expect – albeit sometimes unwillingly – to personally pay for things previously paid for collectively through taxes. As seen in higher education, this is transforming relationships, turning communal activities into customer transactions. Expectations of the arts experience are changing. Although these may lead to new income streams to replace public funding, we must ask, at what cost? Part of that cost is to the workforce and damaging distortions within the workforce, all of which limits what it can do and reduces creative resilience. Young people in the sector find it hard to establish the kinds of livelihoods and homes seen as standard for the Boomer generation. Resentment blossoms on all sides. More people live alone. Politics is also polarising, consensus fraying in the face of global crises and varied fundamentalisms.

Climate change is causing physical and psychological damage, with many artists responding. The world is more interconnected and internationalised, and Britain more diverse, but some define their identity in narrower ways. Divides and tensions result, with many feeling ignored, sidelined, frustrated or simply puzzled. Culture can reflect, react to and reimagine these crises, though notions of instrumentalism personally (‘well-being’), locally (‘place-making’, ‘regeneration’) and nationally (‘economic return’) are contested.

Why this matters

Why, a cynic may ask, does that matter? If there are enough talented people prepared to work for the reward available, in the conditions available, somehow making great work that moves or enlivens, what’s the problem? If you want security or fairness, don’t go into the arts, train as a plumber, a nurse, an accountant or a lawyer, they’d say. And like all clichés, there’s an element of

truth in there. There is risk built into every step of the creative life, if you're doing it right. From ideas to showing the first attempts, to stepping into the light or opening the gallery doors or publishing the book, it is risky. The financial returns reflect this. As the artist and economist Hans Abbing showed in his book *Why Are Artists Poor?*, the arts is a space where some win very big and the majority do not, regardless of the creative merits of their work.² There is no shortage of young people with ambition, talent, and families with money and networks to help them get established in their creative careers, sorting placements, helping out with money during the unpaid internships that are still all too common. We won't want for high quality arts, and well-curated museums. There'll even be a good degree of performative commitment to diversity and equality, to many of the things I talk about later. You don't get an arts education these days without learning to talk the talk.

Yet, if we are to have a cultural sector that reflects the fine grain and nuance of our nations and our imaginations, we need people of all types and backgrounds working in it. Without that, we're unlikely to see and hear the stories we need to, to recognise the cultures within all our communities, and the pleasures and benefits will remain an integral part of being privileged, rather than the basis for cultural democracy.

Without that the sector will remain unable, except in patches and glimpses, to talk and listen in dialogue with the full range of the population, and to walk through the trials of today and tomorrow. We'll have something narrow, with few Black and brown faces (and many of those forced into stereotyped roles), few working class voices (again, often forced into prole-play), and a sector dominated by people who grew up with parents who were senior managers and professionals, who'd been to university and might have insight into how the business of culture worked. Of course there will be exceptions, as there have been in the past. One of the things *Culture is Bad for You* by Orian Brooke, Dave O'Brien and Mark Taylor demonstrates, by focusing on data alongside individual stories, is that this is actually not that different to the period many older cultural professionals think of as 'a golden age'.³ Yes, there were things like a relatively pressure-free dole, which helped many musicians get started, and the fabled Enterprise Allowance that helped many people start what we would now call 'creative businesses' to escape signing on for a year. But the make-up of the workforce was as exclusive as it is today, when graduates face the extra challenges of student debt, and higher and higher expectations from

employers in terms of levels of qualification.

Covid and lockdown are already having a disastrous effect on many people. A study in late 2020, from the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre, suggests that in the first six months of the lockdown, employment in music, performing and visual arts shrank by 30%, and that there were many more people leaving the industry than usual⁴. (It is chastening to note, though, that in a more typical year an average of 10% of people leave the sector anyway.) Although the demographics of this phenomenon remain unclear, it is plain that freelancers are especially affected, especially those without savings or family funds to tide them over during the crisis. This is likely to especially impact Black and other minoritised communities, and disabled people. There is a great risk that people from marginalised groups leave the sector in high numbers.

We cannot be confident that future talent from all parts of our communities will thrive, given these changes come on top of what we have seen in recent years. The school timetable and curriculum have squeezed arts and design subjects in many schools. This has led to drastic drops in pupils taking arts and creative GCSEs. Brexit will mean fewer people able to travel to work in the UK, and less work in Europe for UK artists, with additional complications and cost. (Each touring musician is likely to have to pay more than £360 per year per country according to the Musicians' Union, and may have extra costs and requirements around work permits, insurances and instrument documentation.) But even if that is pessimistic, there will still be missed opportunities, weaker businesses and diminished resilience in the sector if it does not nurture an important asset: its people – *all* its people, including freelancers as well as those on PAYE contracts.

At the most basic level, we must begin therefore by doubting whether the sector is currently, consistently, a place to do good work in a healthy way, and how overextended the sector is. The 2017 Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices stated as its vision that “All work in the UK economy should be fair and decent with realistic scope for development and fulfilment.”⁵ All evidence suggests that this is not the case in culture right now. Despite some excellent practice, the cultural workforce is not diverse enough to meet the challenges the sector faces due to forces such as technological and demographic change, globalisation and political uncertainty. Levels of investment in training and

development are insufficient, and levels of reward are, on average, far lower than comparably educated sectors. As a result, the working culture of culture is demanding, inflexible and stressful, and fuels inequality and lack of diversity by excluding many people.

Why start here, with this discussion of the problems of the workforce, when many in our sector have proved brilliant at ignoring issues of inequality, and when there are issues of basic survival at stake? (As there often are, of course: pick a year and someone was facing a crisis of some sort, while others did well, as – let’s not forget – some continue to do.) Nor do I start here because the arts and cultural sector exists *for* its workforce. I placed artists at the centre of my sketch of an arts ecology in *Making Adaptive Resilience Real* because nothing happens without their practice. But the sector does not exist primarily for their benefit, in my conception of it at least, but for the benefit of all society, including artists and creative practitioners.

The conditions of the workforce matter because they affect who gets to make culture. And that matters because culture and creativity is one realm we explore, ‘set’ and, paradoxically, resist distinctions of class, power and privilege. They are also, paradoxically, where we can resist the excluding and narrowing consequences of those distinctions. We know the subsidised arts are enjoyed by people of all backgrounds, but disproportionately by the better off and the better educated, reflecting the workforce. We know many people still feel excluded from arts and culture, and that this mirrors other exclusions in everyday life.

Work not jobs: Self-employment and Precarious Portfolios

More than 35 years ago, work and management guru Charles Handy wrote a book called *The Future of Work*. He wrote: “The signs are that there are not going to be enough conventional jobs to go around – not full-time, lifetime jobs with an employer who pays you a pension for the ten years or so of your retirement... the supply of jobs, as defined today, is unlikely to be adequate to meet the demand... We have to look beyond economics to the definition of a job, to the meaning of work and the measure of success and meaning in human life.”⁶ This illustrates two things. First, it shows that ‘the future of work’ displays some persistent or very-slow-to-change trends. Technology remains both threat and opportunity, for instance. Now that some of that

future is our past, we can see that things change only slowly – or perhaps not so much slowly as persistently.

It also suggests that much of the cultural sector has been, in many ways, *already* operating in the future of work in the neoliberal economy, a future that now spreads to the rest of the workforce. Demand to work in the arts has always outstripped available jobs or work, leading to positive and negative traits. Flexibility, creativity and passion co-exist with low pay, patchy collective representation, the challenge of saving for a pension. (Because the cultural workforce is better off and better educated, they are also more likely on average to live more than the 10 years after retirement that pensions used to predict, as average life expectancy has risen from 70.8 (for men) and 76.8 (for women) between 1980 and 1982 to 79.4 and 83.1 respectively in 2010-12. Socio-economic disadvantage brings life expectancy down drastically, with men from the 10% most deprived areas living almost a decade less than those from the 10% least deprived⁷.) An abundance of potential activity co-exists with uncertainty and instability of return. This pattern *is* cultural work, and many people I have talked to about workforce development have felt it is so engrained in the system it is unlikely to change.

The shifts in social mobility are beyond social policy, one academic told me when I was researching this area. You see widening inequalities between the rich, the poor and the average throughout society, not only in the cultural sector. The Social Mobility Commission suggested pre-Covid that graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds still struggle to find appropriate work, that wages have stagnated especially amongst the young, and that the gaps in attainment between children from poor and rich backgrounds will take 40 years to close.⁸ The predictions for the workforce post-Covid are that this will only be grimmer and tougher in future.

An overarching trend in the marketised, fragmented economy is a shift to *work* over *jobs*. This is enabled by technology, and relies on (and creates) the kind of individual, precariously situated workers often found in the creative industries. As one speaker at a Davos conference put it, “With tech enablement, employment will no longer be the dominant model or the singular model through which companies get work done.”⁹ The Aspen Institute’s Future of Capitalism¹⁰ identifies a “fragmentation of the firm”, echoing that described by Charles Handy in 1984 as typical of Japanese business, with a

contractor network integral to large corporations. As well as project-based teams including portfolio workers becoming common, platform-based businesses such as Uber, Deliveroo and Amazon Mechanical Turk operating in the so-called gig economy are disrupting the idea of fixed ‘jobs’, down to single tasks. (I half expect to find some Grantium-related jobs on offer on Amazon Mechanical Turk, where you can pay for ‘Human Intelligence Tasks’, to help navigate the much-loathed grants portal of Arts Council England, but no, not yet. I can’t help thinking this is a missed opportunity for boosting the resilience of many people in the subsidised part of the cultural sector. Arts Council England may eventually improve Grantium, which is a classic example of downshifting from something good to something less good to save money – it was introduced after government reductions in funding – but portals will be portals...)

‘Tech enablement’ offers release from mundane and routine work, and the restrictions of a single employer. The massive disadvantages, though, are vulnerability, lack of benefits and often low pay. They can also exacerbate dissatisfaction with work. In a UK survey pre-Covid, only one in five families said they have got the right balance between time to spend with family and money (earning or having enough income) to see their family thrive, with over a third saying they haven’t got enough time or money. Almost half of parents are not comfortable raising the issue of workload and hours with their employer, with fathers less comfortable asking for formal flexible working arrangements.¹¹ This, of course, was before many people were working from home, or living at work, which turned those issues into mutant versions of the same competing demands.

The percentage of self-employed people in the entire UK workforce has doubled in recent years. In 1980, the self-employed accounted for less than 8% of the workforce, but this had risen to 15% by 2016 – 4.25m people. The increase has occurred within each age cohort, although it has been greatest among older people. The self-employed are now more likely to work alone. In 1990, 30% hired other workers, but in 2016 only around 16% employed others. The cultural sector has a high proportion of self-employed workers – more than 40%, with more than 75% in theatre and visual arts.

Until the Covid-19 lockdowns, self-employment was generally seen to have benefits such as flexibility and variety, but lockdown revealed the precarity

beneath that. A million people were unable to receive any support from the government, due to having started only recently, low earnings or to having worked through a combination of director-owned companies and dividends. In addition, both the government's Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) and Arts Council England's Covid-19 Emergency Fund for Individuals included requirements of 50% of income from self-employment, affecting those with portfolio careers including PAYE employment, and those paid through limited companies and dividends. In the UK the tax incentive to be self-employed gets bigger as earnings rise (a self-employed worker is £200 better off than a PAYE worker if earning £10,000 pa, but £7000 if earning £100,000.) However, earnings for self-employed people tend to be lower than those in PAYE contracted roles, and their earnings remained more or less stagnant for two decades pre-Covid. The increase in self-employment since the turn of the century was more of a UK phenomenon than a European one, with self-employment decreasing in some countries. Only 13% of self-employed people had training in 2018 – half the percentage of employees trained.¹²

The Resolution Foundation suggests there are two tribes of self-employed – the precarious and the privileged. Cultural professions would on the whole fall into the former, despite the level of education typically seen, with artists and writers typically earning less than £10,000.¹³ Creative Skills Europe emphasises that creative workers must increasingly be portfolio workers, linking this to the fact that “job demand is still higher than supply”.¹⁴ Susan Jones has argued that ‘self-employed’ as a category does not reflect the reality of visual artists, and for a ‘Status of Artist’ category.¹⁵

Lack of employer focus

A lack of focus on workforce diversity and development by employers, boards and recruitment panels is a central issue. Workforce development has not received the strategic attention or investment it deserves. If behaviours must change for investment to match ambition, as I argue, it will take more than employers alone, but employers will need to take a leadership role.

There is no data available to confirm the levels of financial investment in workforce development and training: funded organisations tend not to report

on it. The most recently published Arts Council England annual submission reports covering National Portfolio Organisations (those receiving four-year regular funding) do not cover training or development. Anecdotal evidence – including my own as the ‘squeaky wheel’ about CPD budgets on various boards – suggests training budgets have been squeezed in recent years. Many have come to rely on funder-led ‘schemes’ to provide training and development programmes at subsidised cost – from Clore to the various programmes within dedicated (and competitive) funding streams. Succession planning is patchy at best.

It would be harsh to say the sector has paid lip service to diversifying and training its workforce, but more than a few people would say it. This was clear especially in the light of increased attention and understanding of racial injustice and racism after the summer of 2020, with the killing of George Floyd and the resurgence of Black Lives Matter. Action, not more words, was a common feeling.

In UK Theatre’s Workforce Review Of The UK Offstage Theatre And Performing Arts Sector staff identified a perceived lack of professionalism from both employers and workers in terms of organisational culture, highlighting antiquated attitudes to flexible working.¹⁶ Research I have been involved in around disabled people in the workforce is consistent with this.

Statistics suggest a values-action gap between what the sector says, or agrees to with funders, around diversity, and the cumulative results of its recruitment and workforce decisions. That women, working class people, Black and other minoritised people, and disabled people are under-represented is now well established. We see sociological differences in both consumption and production of culture.¹⁷ O’Brien et al have identified that core cultural occupations, such as music, publishing, film and TV, and the museums sector, all include more people from affluent, middle class social backgrounds than the population. Those with working class social origins are under-represented. Gender, ethnicity and education can also lead to exclusion from the cultural workforce.¹⁸

Making A Shift, a report I co-wrote in 2016 with other associates of EW Group, found that D/deaf and disabled people were under-represented in the cultural workforce, and suffered systemic exclusion. Distressing stories of

bullying and refusal to adjust spaces and working practices to avoid disabling people were common. This affected not only disabled people but also women and those with caring responsibilities. A perceived lack of professionalism was described as ‘dire’ by one interviewee, and may put some people off entering or staying in the sector. Whilst some areas such as dance had greater numbers of disabled people than might be expected, others could be said to be unrepresentative in their workforces. Music and visual arts organisations have relatively low levels of employment of disabled people as a proportion of their staffing. Only one in 20 disabled people working in organisations receiving regular funding from Arts Council England was employed in visual arts, where we might have expected this figure to be almost one in ten if it were proportionate to the pattern of employment across the sector. In music, the employment of disabled people was similarly a little over half of what might be expected if the general pattern applied.

The root cause of this I would sum up as the culture of culture: a lack of flexibility and imagination about who could work in culture and how. Too often the models imposed create patterns of work which are, in actuality, unhealthy, disabling and stressful for everyone, including those without impairments or limiting conditions. High entry expectations in terms of education and experience gained through volunteering, placements and interning rule many out. Then, a potentially stressful and demanding pattern of precarity, long hours, low income, networking to progress and inflexibility of practice makes it difficult for some disabled and disadvantaged people, and those with family or caring responsibilities, especially women, to remain. This applies to all kinds of impairments and health conditions. Limitations on the support available, either to the individual through government support, or through organisations make this worse. Some businesses are less successful – or in a few instances unwilling – in making the adjustments necessary to *enable* people rather than *disable* them.

These factors also impede progress in making the arts and culture workforce more representative of the population as a whole, as they also create barriers to, for instance, some women, those with family or carer responsibilities, and those from lower income backgrounds. Progression was also difficult: “If you are disabled and going for senior management roles in the arts, you have to be twice as good as able-bodied candidates, as appointment panels (often made up of trustees) are largely conservative and risk averse when it comes to

appointing potential leaders, and disability is regarded as a major risk.” Many D/deaf and disabled people found it more practical to become self-employed, despite the precarity of that situation.

Related in some ways to the working culture is the aesthetic culture in arts and museums. Some interviewees were clear that rigid thinking about standards of excellence disabled some people. From notions of how dancers and actors might move on stage, how mental health or neurodiverse conditions might appear in visual arts or literature, progress in both arts practice and inclusion of disabled people was slow due to a lack of awareness of the creative possibilities of different ways of working and being. The creative potential of work by disabled artists, and that within inclusive companies combining disabled and non-disabled artists, was often seen as an advantage. Programmes such as Unlimited have broken fresh ground in recent times.

Growth in the workforce

Despite this picture, until Covid, the DCMS economic estimates showed significant growth in creative industries and the cultural sector (defined as those industries with a cultural object at their centre), outstripping that of the economy in general since 2010. Research for Arts Council England suggested the sector was worth £13.5 billion to the UK economy in 2018, up from £12.8 billion the previous year, and contributed £3.4 billion in tax. It predicted growth to £15.2 billion by 2025, even with the effects of Covid. The research – part of advocacy for the Cultural Recovery Fund, and so best taken with a pinch of salt – predicted that the sector’s Gross Value Added (GVA) would return to its pre-lockdown level of £13.5bn by 2022.¹⁹ This would indicate a high degree of ‘bounce back’ type resilience, and runs counter to the feelings of many in the sector.

This sector is not fit for the future in a fair, decent and sustainable way. It will not become so if it continues to under-invest in and over-expect from its workforce. It is vital that employers – ultimately at board level – make a step change in their approach to and investment in workforce/sector development. They control the working conditions – pay, culture, pensions etc – and the investment made into training and continuing professional development. They need to work with providers such as further and higher

education to create pathways for workers in all roles, using apprenticeships and PhDs alike to ensure skilled workers. And they need to recognise their own lead role in shaping and developing the workforce whilst encouraging employee engagement. Although data is lacking, it appears that a combination of budgetary pressures and a related reliance on funders to stimulate or even provide development opportunities have given employers an easy albeit often guilty opt-out. If we accept for argument's sake that finances will remain tight, progress may be best achieved by addressing culture – as has begun in the specific fields of leadership and fundraising.

We need a big conversation about working culture in culture – to expose and tackle the lack of flexibility and long (often unpaid) hours, in the way the unpaid internship issue has been addressed to some extent. Although there have been some encouraging signs during Covid, it is by no means certain these will continue. Lasting change, I propose, is more likely to come if we put workforce development in the context of long-term collaborative approaches to creative resilience, and of models of leadership and community engagement. Individuals, organisations and sectors need to see the connection between their own futures and those of the workforce.

This is something Future Arts Centres have been active in, as well as the many consortia which have developed leadership and resilience programmes with support of funders. Sometimes, these have focused on particular groups, such as Sour Lemons with its emphasis on young Black creatives, or Creative Gloucester with its local ecology focus.

There is an ongoing need to cultivate skills that meet the needs of a flat and dispersed sector. The notion of career progression is changing from a hierarchical image to one of expansion and connection. An image of widening circles instead of a ladder. The sector needs specialist skills and crosscutting, general skills. These are especially needed in management, revenue generation and fundraising, digital, and co-creation with communities. Any skills agenda must cover project skills for a project world, rather than only train people for full-time employed jobs that are likely to shrink in number. Already more than 40% of people in museums, galleries and libraries, or music, performing and visual arts are in part-time jobs. (If anything, this should grow, as some 'freelance' gigs would be better designed as part-time, short-term contracts, imperfect as those can be.)

There are few very large-scale employers in the cultural sector able to run their own individual development programmes, although some such as National Theatre and RSC have developed schemes for their own staff. These organisations could open these out more to others, or connect through networks. Sector bodies or national organisations have led many useful collaborations or initiatives, the Plus TATE network being one example. This is something to build on, encouraging a coherent set of collaborative and co-operative networks or platforms that target specific issues or groupings, as well as open programmes. These could use learning from the models such as the Clore Leadership Programme, Resilient Museums, Museums Women Leaders Network and regional or city-wide initiatives such as ASTONish in Birmingham or Sync for disabled leaders.

The chronic issues of freelance cultural workers such as lack of sick pay, late payments, affordability of training, and pensions, insurance and tax regimes, could all be alleviated by co-operatives and membership schemes. The Royal Society of the Arts report *The Self-organising Self-employed* gives examples of innovations in this area.²⁰ US academics Melissa Valentine and Michael Bernstein argue that “platforms could eventually dampen insecurity by playing a role that companies have historically played: providing benefits, topping off earnings if workers’ freelance income is too low or too spotty, even allowing workers to organize”.²¹ This might build on services currently provided by organisations such as unions, a-n The Artists Information Company or the National Association of Writers in Education, or the workspace movement.

Levers for change or tipping points

Immediately before the coronavirus crisis of 2020, I was whipping around England interviewing people and running round tables to assess the needs, priorities and potential for change in workforce development, to inform Arts Council England’s thinking in the area. (At one, a group of HR directors joined, fresh from updating their Coronavirus Risk Plans – I have often wondered how many times they have done that since.) The issues were clearly felt to be perennial, and there was understandable frustration expressed by many I met with at the lack of progress. There was, though, even before Covid, lockdowns, Cultural Recovery Funds, the shift online and so on, a sense that the old normal could not stand. The issues of inequality within such

contradictory times had gained increasing attention, and more organisations and initiatives were specifically addressing them, such as The Creative Society, Beatfreakz, The Cultural Exchange and others. Creative and Cultural Skills was bringing sharp focus to matters of access and inclusion, and to core skills.

I ended up writing my report as the conversations about change in the sector and society rose in intensity. The themes felt prescient, showing how the ‘new’ situation people were describing had, in fact, been there all along. The sector had a set of ongoing needs, repeatedly identified by research and voices in the sector, that the sector had failed to address – employers, funders and policy makers particularly. These formed the core of what was now needed: a culture change. To connect the new normal and the old disappointing reality, though, would mean support in relation to core skills and change skills.

The heart of any culture change should be a shift to valuing the workforce, given their importance to creative resilience. This means investing strategically in attracting, retaining and developing people in inclusive, supportive working cultures that respect diversity, inclusion and equality to build a properly diverse and inclusive workforce representative of local populations. This would in turn mean employers – senior management teams and boards – altering their practice. They must invest in workforce skills long-term, and alter recruitment and employment practices. There would need to be a wider recognition of the range of roles within the sector, and the transferability of skills across the chain of roles. A new approach to investment and reward, including for freelancers, away from precarity for some and high pay for CEOs, would also help.

It is clear, too, that there are core skills which still need attention if we are to have a more resilient, equitable and productive sector. These include fundamental management skills including recruitment, performance management and people development; the legal responsibilities of employers; care and duty of care and emotional intelligence as well as financial management, business planning and budgeting; income generation including fundraising, philanthropy and loan finance; data-informed decision-making, commercial skills, use of assets and activities, technical skills, IP and partnership working. Working in digital workflows, in virtual or distanced teams, in flexible working patterns and non-hierarchical organisational models are also important. All these are needed if the sector is to be resilient and play its role in creative communities.

Alongside the core skills must sit a set of change skills: creative resilience, business modelling and restructuring; co-creation with communities, families and non-arts partners (e.g. local authorities, the NHS, Clinical Commissioning Groups, care homes et al), working beyond the culture system – in ecosystems of place especially, reflective learning practice, leading and working a multi-generational workforce. Staying in touch as a senior leader, self-care and personal resilience were also seen as important. Finally, out of that combination of ingredients, came a change skill of managing a balance of coming and goings in the workforce. This must be slow enough to do the work well, fast enough for change and fresh thinking.

The support needed includes clear leadership from funders. This should centre on a shared purpose with the sector – the heart of creative resilience as I will explain later. This can embrace a clear set of shared outcomes and expectations of employers (boards and management teams). Only from a culture of shared purpose can funders hold people to account for their behaviours as employers. Business models would have to shift to reflect adequate levels of pay and investment in training, including for regular freelancers. (Or all freelancers through a variant of the apprenticeship training levy paid by large employers.) Investment in networks and sharing of learning, toolkits, case studies and practical guides, alongside improved provision of advice, guidance, brokerage and insight from research would help. There is also a personal aspect to the support needed, through peer networks, confidential hotlines, coaching and mentoring to support self-care. A set of Workforce Outcomes and Norms to which everyone can sign up and commit to act would help creative resilience across the ecology. This connects to the kinds of anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-ableism plans people are looking to in the wake of Black Lives Matters and the disproportionate impact of Covid on Black and other minoritised groups and disabled people.

It is interesting to look back at those conversations and see what has happened since. The talk of investment into the workforce has an ironic edge given the level of redundancies and furloughing still ongoing as I write. This has affected all kinds of staff, and has particularly hurt freelancers. There are good examples, though, of organisations supporting freelancers through involvement in discussions about the future, paid work, commissions and so on, and by paying contracts even where work has been impossible due to lockdown restrictions. This has not been universal, though, and many

freelancers and junior staff, especially front of house, have felt abandoned and been worst hit by redundancies. The kinds of networks discussed have proved valuable to the whole ecology. They have advised funders, shared information and approaches, provided support to peers and friends, and challenged bad practices. They also created spaces for dialogue and mutual support when necessary upheavals such as Black Lives Matters gave new impetus to anti-racist and anti-discrimination work.

I hope time will show that the sector was able to grasp the crisis as a teachable moment. (This is the closest this book will get to a cliff-hanger.) I move, right now, between hope and pessimism. It is a moment that reveals possible change. As we emerge from the pandemic's worst immediate consequences we must hold boards to account for their leadership on workforce issues, and their contribution to the sector workforce and creative resilience discussions. Business models must resist over-production and excessive extraction of value, so people have time and space to learn. We should collaborate to share the mindsets of creative resilience, co-creation and welcome.

Attention must be paid to the potential tipping points in the system already, so the change already aspired to becomes real, no longer held back by precedent, timidity, conservatism and restrictive business models. This can build on the many networks and collaborative efforts seen during Covid. Informal peer groups and existing network have stepped up. Lobbying and development groups such as Freelancers Task Force and We Shall Not Be Removed have emerged. If the sector ignores those tipping points, and does not use them as levers for change, the patterns of exclusion and damage will worsen. This is likely to lead to even less diversity, inclusion and equity, and even thinner stories.

I have begun with a picture of the workforce because this is at once a central component of creative resilience and a reason for more focus on the creative resilience of the ecosystem. The over-emphasising of individualised resilience – are you strong enough for change and shocks? – and financialised resilience – are your income streams reliable enough? – has intensified the patterns I have described. They lead to more pressure on people and more marketised, target-driven management systems. They lead to debates about viability. This is bad for the workforce, but also narrows the work done, which distorts the relationships with communities, artists, audiences and participants,

not least through widespread short-termism. To better connect to creative communities, we must turn our attention to how creative resilience of organisations and sectors could better serve the interests of both artists or workers and communities and society.