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Auf der Suche nach ,Cultural Leadership‘

Editorial zum Themenschwerpunkt

MARTIN ZIEROLD*

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Die Bedeutung von ‚Cultural Leadership‘, Schwerpunktthema des aktuellen Heftes der *Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement*, ergibt sich vor allem aus den internationalen Diskursen um Kulturmanagement, Kulturpolitik, Kulturwissenschaften und Kulturosoziologie, in denen sich seit einigen Jahren eine wachsende Bedeutung dieses Begriffspaares beobachten lässt, die auch ihren Niederschlag in den Curricula von einschlägigen Studiengängen und Weiterbildungsprogrammen fand.

Ein Grund für die bemerkenswerte Begriffskarriere war und ist dabei sicherlich auch, dass er in der Regel einen eher undefinierten Gebrauch findet und damit für sehr unterschiedliche Verwendungsweisen offen ist. Ausgehend von dieser Vielfalt wurden zwei Schwerpunkte gesetzt, um die beiden unterschiedlichen und häufig anzutreffenden Lesarten des Konzepts Cultural Leadership zu differenzieren: Cultural Leadership kann dann erstens als (meist kaum weiter definierte) Bezeichnung für Führung von bzw. in Kulturorganisationen verstanden werden, zweitens jedoch auch als Begriff, der im Sinne des Wertekanons zum Beispiel der UN-Menschenrechts-Charta oder der Sustainable Development Goals auf eine kulturelle Führungsrolle von Personen oder Organisationen für die Gesellschaft oder gar den internationalen Dialog verweist – etwa im Kontext von ‚cultural diplomacy‘.

Cultural Leadership in Organisationen und Projekten

Auch wenn sich der einstige Fokus auf Hochkultur in der Kulturmanagement-Forschung und -Lehre längst relativiert hat, stehen häufig nach wie vor Großbetriebe – Museen, Theater, Orchester oder Festivals und Akteure der Kreativwirtschaft wie die internationalen Player der Musik- und Filmindustrie – im Mittelpunkt der Aufmerksamkeit des Fachs. Dabei sind in der Kulturmanagementpraxis bspw. im Kontext der Kreativwirtschaft Freiberufler sowie Führungskräfte und Mitarbeiter

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und Mitarbeiterinnen in kleineren Kultureinrichtungen in der Mehrheit. Daher wird in diesem Heft ein weiter Blick auf das Kulturmanagement in seiner ganzen Breite über alle künstlerischen und institutionellen Formen von großen Organisationen bis zu informellen Initiativen, Projekten und Netzwerkstrukturen mit insbesondere vergleichenden Ansätzen intendiert: Während in der allgemeinen Führungsforschung längst Konzepte wie ‚distributed leadership‘, ‚post-heroische Führung‘, ‚Postbürokratie‘ oder auch ‚demokratische Organisation‘ diskutiert werden, scheint in den großen Kulturinstitutionen besonders im deutschsprachigen Raum auch heute noch vielfach ein höchst traditionelles Verständnis von Führung vorzuherrschen, das streng hierarchisch (und heroisch) auf die Figur der Intendanz bzw. der künstlerischen Leitung ausgerichtet ist. Gerade mit Blick auf die Innovationskraft einer Organisation lässt sich diese Situation kritisch hinterfragen: Wo die Basis für Innovation verstärkt in ko-kreativen Prozessen gesehen wird, stehen starre, hierarchische Führungsmodelle womöglich grundlegenden Innovationen im Wege. Die Rufe nach mehr Innovationen in den Kulturorganisationen, die von Kulturpolitik, von Protagonisten des Kulturmanagements selbst und auch von Teilen des Publikums seit Jahren erhoben werden, stehen somit im Widerspruch zu häufig fundamental konservativen Organisations- und Führungskulturen in großen Kulturbetrieben. Dem gegenüber steht der Blick auf alternativen Kulturszenen, privatrechtlich-gemeinnützige Institutionen, informelle Initiativen oder auch Startups der Kreativwirtschaft, die als Avantgarde für künstlerische und gesellschaftliche Innovationen stehen könnten, und Impulse auch für eine neue Führungs- bzw. Arbeitskultur und mehr Mut zur Innovation in traditionellen Kulturbetrieben setzen könnten.

Was also kann die Führungsforschung zum Thema Führung in Kulturorganisationen (aller Couleur und Größe) beitragen? Welche Modelle scheinen für die unterschiedlichen Organisationstypen angemessen? Wie lassen sich ggf. sinnvolle Veränderungen angesichts der über Jahrzehnte gewachsenen traditionellen Strukturen in Organisationen realisieren? Wie – wenn überhaupt – lässt sich Cultural Leadership lehren und lernen? Welche Beispiele aus der Praxis können für Forschung, Lehre und Praxis instruktiv sein? Dies sind beispielhafte – aber keineswegs abschließende – Fragen, die für eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema Führung zu berücksichtigen sind.

Cultural Leadership für Gesellschaften und internationale Kooperationen

In der zweiten Lesart verweist das Konzept Cultural Leadership auf das Ziel, Personen, Organisationen oder Netzwerke in die Lage zu versetzen, eine im weiten Sinne kulturgestalten-de Führungsrolle für die Gesellschaft oder auch die internationale politische und gesellschaftliche Zusammenarbeit einzunehmen. Ein solches Verständnis findet sich u.a. im britischen Diskurs um Cultural Leadership für den ‚cultural sector‘ oder auch in Projekten auf EU-Ebene im Rahmen der cultural diplomacy.

Auch in diesem Kontext stellt sich zunächst die Frage nach angemessenen Lesarten von ‚Leadership‘: Unter welchen Voraussetzungen können Personen, Organisationen oder Netzwerke eine solche Führungsrolle übernehmen und wie ist dann Führung zu verstehen, wo doch gerade in der internationalen Zusammenarbeit Führungsanspruch und Überlegenheits-Gesten westlicher Staaten längst diskreditiert sind? Was kann angesichts der zahlreichen gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Herausforderungen auf lokaler, regionaler, internationaler und globaler Ebene der Beitrag des Kulturmanagements zu deren Bewältigung sein? Inwiefern kann das Konzept von Cultural Leadership hier hilfreich oder hinderlich sein, um Impulse für Innovationen in Forschung, Lehre und Praxis zu setzen? Welchen Grad an werteorientierter Normativität kann oder womöglich auch: sollte interdisziplinäre kulturwissenschaftliche Forschung und Lehre hier haben? Wie kann Forschung diese Fragestellungen beantworten helfen? Welche Rolle sollte der Begriff Cultural Leadership in diesem Zusammenhang in der Lehre spielen? Welche Beispiele gibt es aus der Praxis des Kulturmanagements und der Kulturpolitik – und welche Erwartungen haben diese wiederum an Kulturmanagement-Forschung und -Lehre? Auch dies sind lediglich exemplarische und nicht umfassend gemeinte Fragen, die für das Thema Relevanz besitzen.

Imposed leadership in UK funded theatre and the implications for risk and innovation

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Abstract

Using the theory of stakeholder salience and stakeholder discourse, this article questions the effect of arts policy bodies on the way the cultural sector assigns leadership. It argues that in satisfying the demands of risk-averse public management, arts policy bodies implicitly and explicitly impose the role of sectoral leader on the heads of largest best-funded cultural organisations. As a result, opportunities for alternate forms of leadership to emerge outside organisations are restricted. It renders organisational leaders in conflicting obligations to multiple stakeholders – their funders, their organisations and their sector – and exposes implicit perceptions of value. Finally, in reinforcing existing organisational structures, imposed leadership inhibits the risk-taking and innovation these same arts policy bodies promote in their strategies. This prevents the emergence of more transgressive forms of leadership and innovative cultural production and affects the ability of artists to be perceived as leaders. Consequently, artists' sectoral and policy influence is diminished and their precarity and inequality reinforced at a structural level. While focused on subsidised theatre in the UK, this research offers wider implications for how we understand policy influence on ethical leadership behaviours in the cultural sector.

Keywords

Risk, stakeholder theory, policy influence, cultural leadership

Public bodies, through a series of implicit and explicit relationships, impose sectoral leadership roles on the heads of the largest best funded cultural sector organisations and in doing so inhibit risk and innovation. This article is drawn from a wider study of the artist as stakeholder in policymaking and leadership in the UK theatre sector. It brings together two areas of discourse in arts management and cultural policy: cultural leadership and cultural labour. Through this, it asks new questions about policy influence in the ethics and behaviours of cultural leadership, the structural inequalities informed by attitudes to risk, and the disparity between arts policy rhetoric and enacted arts policy. This disparity is examined here in relation to sustainability, risk and innovation.

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Exploring first the background and approach to this study, the findings are presented in three parts concerned with the implicit and explicit influence of policy over sectoral leadership, the positioning of cultural leaders as a nexus of all stakeholder relationships and the attitudes to risk and innovation present. It will go on to discuss the implications of imposed leadership before offering some conclusions and propositions for further research.

1. Background

The dominance of policy over sectoral leadership behaviour emerged as a focus of this study when the researcher set out to investigate how the perceived roles and status of different players in UK subsidised theatre affected their influence over public arts policy. Research has demonstrated that political and public management interfere with the business models and operation of the subsidised arts sector (most notably ALEXANDER 2017; CAUST 2010a) and the power of individual charismatic cultural leadership over policy directions has been examined (NISBETT; WALMSLEY 2016). However, insufficient attention has been paid to how policy bodies affect the selection and endorsement of leadership in the cultural sector, and how these processes reinforce hierarchies and existing systems of cultural production.

The interplay between policy rhetoric and policy as it is enacted in decisions is deliberately ambiguous (GRAY 2015; KLEPPE 2017a; SCHUSTER et al. 2003). Mirroring this, the reciprocity of influence between the arts sector and public bodies is similarly unclear. Gray (2015: 67) argues that these ambiguities are necessary, a result of a lack of definition around what culture *is* and *means*. Arts policy, treated principally as the decisions by which public arts funding is spent, is frequently a dominant *de facto* cultural policy, “explicit arts agency strategies becoming confounded into implicit national cultural strategies” (DURRER; MAGAN 2017: 190). This suggests that policy is implicitly delivered through behaviours more than it is explicit via formal statements.

In contrast to this ambiguity, arts policy and public funding systems generally and particularly in the UK (where the attention of this study is focused) are driven by political interests in demonstrating economic and instrumental value (BELFIORE 2004; DONOVAN/O'BRIEN 2016; GRAY 2007; MANGSET 2018; STEVENSON et al. 2010, KLEPPE 2017a). Furthermore, the influence of New Public Management has

increased attention to risk management, sustainability and accountability in public policy implementation (DONOVAN/O'BRIEN 2016; KLEPPE 2017a). This limits more qualitative or alternate explorations of cultural value (as attempted by CROSSICK/KASZYNSKA 2016; NEELANDS et al. 2015) and gives rise to value measurement as a defence against political interests and a justification of existing funding policies (BELFIORE 2015; MULCAHY 2006). Political priorities of accountability spill over from policy into the arts sector (ALEXANDER 2017; CAUST 2005), influencing not only budget allocations but also the business model by which the sector operates, altering how the sector measures its own performance. This repeats at sector level the pattern of evaluation as justification practised at public policy level (CAUST 2010a; NEWSINGER/GREEN 2016). While this accountability dominance suggests clear and transparent relationships between public bodies and the theatre sector, this research suggests that it is far from clear.

The definition, behaviour and selection of cultural leaders becomes significant when we understand that arts policy is principally communicated between public bodies and arts organisations (HOLDEN 2006) and cultural leadership is principally discussed as organisational (HEWISON 2006). Therefore, leadership can be viewed as a special form of policy influence with a corresponding influence over funding. This gives privileged access to a small number of individuals at the head of funded organisations in the shaping of policy and sector behaviour (NISBETT/WALMSLEY 2016). While the discourse around cultural democracy demands the dispersal of this power (KELLY 1984; BONET/NÉGRIER 2018), this study is concerned with the internal hierarchies at play within subsidised theatre and how they shape its behaviour.

As public arts funding declines and alternate cultural forms evolve and compete for attention, the promotion of cultural leadership through both policy actions and the proliferation of leadership programmes is intrinsically linked to the sustainability of the cultural sector (HEWISON 2004; HEWISON/HOLDEN/JONES 2010; HOLDEN/HEWISON 2011; NISBETT/WALMSLEY 2016). This sustainability is both economic and creative, reflecting a dual rationality as a unique feature of cultural and indeed artistic, leadership among other leadership forms (CAUST 2018; CRAY/INGLIS/FREEMAN 2007; DOUGLAS/FREMANTLE/DAVIE 2009). On the one hand, cultural leaders must achieve economic sustainability as part of the wider driver to transform cultural activity into cultural industries and to develop new business models (BAKHSHI/CUNNINGHAM 2016). On the other, they are charged with the protection

of creative sustainability and must support artists/art-making and promote new, transgressive and alternate forms of cultural production and expression (GLOW 2013; PRICE 2016; ROBINSON 2010). This latter driver connects cultural leadership to concerns of responsibility for diversity promotion, inequality and exclusion (HESMONDHALGH/SAHA 2013; O'BRIEN et al. 2016; SAHA 2013).

The connection of cultural leadership to creative and economic 'sustainability' intrinsically links it to perceived needs for risk-taking and innovation. A number of scholars suggest contemporary cultural leadership is failing in its responsibilities for correcting inequality and failing to evolve its production and decision-making structures (EIKHOF 2017; KUNST 2015). Cultural leaders are increasingly charged with disrupting outdated normalities of practice that inhibit real change (DALBORG/LOFGREN 2016). As Leicester (2010: 23) puts it,

Real cultural leadership involves creative transgression, and a long term perspective. It is not about making the existing system more productive or efficient.

The capacity for more transgressive leadership and the ability to realise innovation are both informed by attitudes to risk both within the practice of arts organisations (in this study, theatre companies and venues) (SGOUREV 2013) and in the prevailing context of national attitudes towards risk-taking (STEPHAN/PATHAK 2016). By contrast, risk is considered an intrinsic element in the lives of artists, both in their creation of original work and in their financial and social precarity (BANKS et al. 2000; MANGSET et al. 2017; MYTNOWYCH 2016; O'BRIEN et al. 2016). While artistic and artists' risk-taking are significant factors in creative sustainability, they are inadequately explored in cultural leadership discourse.

2. Theoretical approach

Both public bodies and cultural leaders are charged with multiple responsibilities from different sources. Their accountability to their lead departments and politicians, or funders and boards of directors is emphasised through the dominance of accountability within policy discussed above. Less visible but no less important, both public bodies and cultural leaders also carry "downward accountability" to organisations, artists, employees and audiences or the general public (WELLENS/JEGERS 2014). The questions of influence and perceptions of value and obligation raised by this highly complex accountability system of

relationships inform the choice of theoretical approach in this study. Stakeholder theory, as Freeman (1984: 67) puts it, recognises business as “a deeply human institution”; its strength lying in its articulation of multi-objective, multi-stakeholder relationships and recognition of multiple forms of value (MITCHELL et al. 2016). All stakeholder relationships are made up of both “implicit and explicit contracts” (FRIEDMAN/MILES 2002: 7). These considerations within stakeholder theory discourse offer much to a discussion about the indivisibility of business and its ethical behaviours (HARRIS/FREEMAN 2008; WICKS 1996; WICKS/GILBERT/FREEMAN 1994) and what implicit agreements exist in the cultural sector beyond explicit contracts, whether between funders, organisations or artists. This article draws on literature around two central elements of the theory – the first is who determines stakeholder salience (or value) and how; the second is an exploration of stakeholder management as an implicitly managerial behaviour.

A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives. (FREEMAN 1984: 25)

This very generalist description as the basis of the theory has been refined to consider factors of risk, dependency, threat and dominance in how individual stakeholders or stakeholder groups are appraised (AGLE/MITCHELL/SONNENFELD 1999; CLARKSON 1995; FREEMAN 1994; MILES 2017). Mitchell, Agle and Wood's (1997: 873-879) theory of stakeholder salience creates a typology of seven stakeholder groups according to factors of power (the capacity to exert control over the organisation), legitimacy (the degree of legitimate claim to the business's attention) and urgency (the immediacy of need). It is managers (or organisational heads in general) who assign salience to groups and their appraisal is informed by their own and their organisation's vested interests (BENSON/DAVIDSON 2010). Therefore, we can consider stakeholder valuation as the subjective response of an individual holding a role of authority and managing competing demands in which their own and their organisational position figure significantly.

Managers sit at the “nexus of contracts” as the only stakeholders in an organisation who develop contracts with all other stakeholder groups and have control over the organisation's “decision-making apparatus” (HILL/JONES 1992: 131-134). This puts them in a privileged position as not only do they control relationships but have intermediary control over how different stakeholders communicate with each other (DONALDSON/PRESTON 1995: 86). Managerial perception influences which stakeholders receive attention in decision-making and in non-profits,

managers must prioritise organisational survival over all else (BASINGER/PETERSON 2008; JOHANSEN/NIELSEN 2016). Dominant stakeholders too affect how managers attribute salience and award attention (BRIDOUX/VISHNAWATHAN 2018). While managerial position and personal advancement is a factor in attributing salience to the most dominant stakeholders, this self-interest is not always negative as all decisions will benefit some stakeholders (BOESSO/KUMAR 2009; PHILLIPS/FREEMAN/WICKS 2003). Stakeholder management, like leadership, is a management behaviour, requiring a balancing of complex multiple relationships and affording the holder of a leader or manager role a highly privileged position of influence (DONALDSON/PRESTON 1995; MINTZBERG 1973, DOH/QUIGLEY 2014).

Studies of the arts and cultural sector using stakeholder theory concentrate predominantly on perceptions of stakeholder value and its influence on decision-making and to some extent leadership (BOERNER/JOBST 2011; HSIEH 2009; RHINE 2015; VOSS/VOSS/MOORMAN 2005). Much of the focus is on marketing, fundraising and external performance and stakeholders are most often treated as financially or contractually connected to the organisation (funders/donors, paying audiences, suppliers and employees). With the exception of Basinger and Peterson (2008), inadequate attention has been paid to how stakeholder salience is attributed in cultural leadership and management with little examination of artists as stakeholders in any artform.

3. Methodology & limitations

Building theory inductively, this qualitative study draws on a relativist interpretation of both reality and knowledge, constructing an understanding of the phenomenon from the perceptions of, and values expressed by participants. The study's interpretive investigation of power, value and control does not imply a tacit acceptance of these hierarchies but derives greater understanding from the interaction between researcher and participants (GUBA/LINCOLN 1994). An etic and feminist perspective was adopted that recognised power differentials in and between participant groups (CRESWELL 2009; RICHARDSON/ST PIERRE 2008). The methodology of this inductive study was devised to limit researcher power (recognising the researcher's role as an former 'insider' to this sector) and give space and respect for diverse and vulnerable voices (BOYATZIS 1998; MADRIZ 2003; WILKINSON 1998; YIN 2011).

The study employed thematic analysis (BOYATZIS 1998; SALDAÑA 2010) and a Constant Comparative Method (BOEIJJE 2002) to analyse and interpret data from multiple sources – key documents from the public bodies, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Questioning focused on the perceptions each participant group carried of the other groups and players in the theatre sector, drawing out understanding of how perceived value/status of players in the sector is assigned and what perceived obligations exist to other stakeholders. Documents and transcripts were coded in stages and a codebook was updated and refined over the duration of the study, distilling emerging themes.

The study's focus on subsidised theatre in the UK is informed by the wider research project from which it is drawn. The ability to draw generalisable hypotheses from a focused study, enables deeper knowledge to be extracted that has macro-implications (EISENHARDT/GRAEBNER/SONENSHEIN 2016; O'REILLY 2009).

Although the boundaries between commercial and subsidised theatre in the UK are fluid (HETHERINGTON 2015; REBELLATO 2015, 2016), greater understanding of the interplay between policy bodies, organisations and artists was derived by focusing on those within subsidised systems, while participants were drawn from identified clusters of theatre activity in Belfast, Cardiff, Bristol, Glasgow and Edinburgh (HAMILTON/GRANGER 2012; NAYLOR et al. 2016; NORTHERN IRELAND THEATRE ASSOCIATION/AUDIENCES NI 2017). All interviews and focus groups took place between May and September 2017, via Skype or in the cities listed above.

Participant selection treated the sector and phenomenon under review as a “system of primary stakeholder groups” (CLARKSON et al. 1994: 86) and recognised that the public (or audiences) are not principal decision-makers of the sector's internal value systems (BROWN 2015). Artists, organisations and their leadership are often conflated, such as in Hewison and Holden's (2006: 25) value triangle but this study separates artists as a distinct group. A total of 83 participants were recruited from three groups detailed below.

1. Policymakers are the four arms-length public bodies operating in the four devolved regions of the UK – Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Arts Council Wales, Arts Council England, Creative Scotland. While the remit of each has evolved to variously include film, TV, heritage, libraries and creative industries, these four bodies are the only dedicated element of the UK state structure with a specific policy remit for the arts, including theatre. Treating their strategies as *de facto*

policy, the study analysed the plans that span the life of the project between 2015 and 2018. They are:

- *Great Art and Culture for Everyone – 10 year strategic framework 2010-2020* (2nd edition) (Arts Council England 2013)
- *Ambitions for the Arts: A Five Year Strategic Plan for the Arts in Northern Ireland 2013 – 2018* (Arts Council of Northern Ireland 2013)
- *Unlocking Potential Embracing Ambition – A shared plan for the arts, screen and creative industries 2014-2024* (Creative Scotland 2014)
- *Imagine Our Vision for Wales Corporate Plan 2013-2018* (Updated) (Arts Council of Wales 2015)
- *Inspire Our Strategy for Creativity and the Arts in Wales* (Arts Council of Wales 2013)

In addition, interviews (6 participants in total) were conducted with the 4 lead officers for theatre/drama/performing arts and 2 additional officers nominated by these bodies as relevant to this study.

2. Leaders are 21 artistic and executive heads of core funded theatres and theatre companies in different cities in the UK, identified from a snowball sample from the first participant group and the supplementary interviews. Of these 6 were Executive Director/Producers, 10 were Artistic Directors, 4 were Artistic Directors who principally programmed and 1 was an Associate Director. All the Artistic Directors had lead or joint executive responsibility. 11 of the 21 were building-based, the remaining were companies.
3. Artists are 44 freelance theatre artists with an additional 6 independent producers working in the UK, recruited in open calls via social media, organisational and network mailing lists and associations' newsletters. The complexity of how they expressed their work as artists meant it was not possible to create subsets but they were drawn from a range of disciplines (mainstage and musical theatre, physical and experimental, Welsh and Gallic theatre, theatre for young audiences) and in a mix of occupations (theatre makers, actors, directors, playwrights and multiple variations).

Interviews were also conducted with representative bodies in the theatre sector, 2 of these also being interviewed as artists (counted above). These participating organisations are:

- UK Theatre
- Federation of Scottish Theatres (its former head)

- Theatres Trust
- Independent Theatre Council
- Creu Cymru
- TheatreNI
- Stage Directors UK
- Theatre Bristol

4. Findings

4.1 Implicit and Explicit policy influence

Political influence and growing controls in public management around value measurement and accountability have altered the way arts policy is enacted by each government's arms-length public body responsible for the arts (ALEXANDER 2017; DONOVAN/O'BRIEN 2016) and these vary "according to time, place and political context" (BELL/OAKLEY 2014: 5). The trajectory towards more instrumentalist and economically driven priorities with reduced or restricted funding and higher levels of bureaucracy is a consistent pattern across the four regions of the UK – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (KLEPPE 2017a; RAMSEY/WATERHOUSE-BRADLEY 2018; STEVENSON et al. 2010).

Data gathered from analysis of the strategies and interviews detailed above reveals these public bodies sit at their own 'nexus' (HILL/JONES 1992) between government and the sector, although the position of their 'arms-length' status and distance from government varies significantly (both regionally and temporally as governments move between elections). These bodies are intermediaries between state and sector, however the state dominates their decision-making and it is to the state they must demonstrate greatest value to survive, whether through justification using evidence of value or by policy attachment to other government priorities (reinforcing the work of GRAY 2008; KLEPPE 2017a; YAMAK/SÜER 2005). Participants from within these agencies show a complex picture of public bodies whose survival is dependent on two things:

- How much the activities they support satisfy government priorities;
- How credible they are as seen as 'expert advisors' to government on the arts and cultural field.

One of the officers (PM3) articulates the delicate balance they must strike as servant, advisor and advocate:

[...] you need to be close enough to continue to be able to contribute into the budgetary argument around government's table. Equally we need to retain a sufficient distance not to therefore be seen as, by either government or by the creative sector, as simply an instrument of government.

While participants in other groups note this “Janus-faced” position (A32) with a mixture of scepticism and sympathy, many believe firmly in the advocacy role of these bodies. All the Policymakers see their agencies as “making the case” for the arts (PM5). However, ultimately this is sacrificed when it is in conflict with implementing government policy. Their ‘advocacy’ becomes dominated by their self-interest and a reinforcement of their own evidence of their own value.

The influence of the public and political sector on arts policy and the resulting pressure exerted over arts management and practice is already well documented (ALEXANDER 2017; CAUST 2005, 2010a) and is recognised by participants from the Leaders and Artists groups as explicit in the skewing of funding towards increasingly proscriptive government targets and non-arts policy attachments, and a perceived loss of attention to aesthetic outcomes. Other areas of policy interest are less clear and these public bodies’ own policy interests show a divergence between stated intentions and actual decisions and actions, as one Artistic Director (LM17) shows:

[...] it's very difficult to find out what their [the public body] strategy is and what their expectations are. They'll say it's about risk taking and about place and about new audiences and so on you know these standard stock things. Beyond that there's no real discussion.

This deliberate ambiguity could be the effect of public bodies “making policy flexibility an essential part of ensuring political survival” (GRAY 2007: 213), nevertheless it is a pattern of implicit behaviour reflected throughout their relationships with the sector.

Theatre (and arts) sector leadership is both implicitly and explicitly influenced by the public bodies responsible for arts funding. The strategy documents reviewed for this study state repeatedly that leadership and development of the sector is the responsibility of the lead organisations; i.e., those in receipt of the largest and most regular funding should carry the “weight of responsibility” (*Arts Council of Northern Ireland* 2013: 5) to address issues of inequality and development beyond their own organisations. This inevitably also means that leadership is vested in building-based companies who receive the largest grant aid and are often the least adaptive organisations due to their size, capital asset and history. Individual officers in public bodies (Policymakers) go further to specify

that the leading roles within these organisations carry leadership responsibility and this is an obligation to their lead funder and the sector precisely because of their level of investment. Responsibilities are articulated variously as: supporting new and emerging artists; increasing diversity; contributing to advocacy; future proofing and developing the whole sector; succession planning for new sector leaders; supporting other organisations; increasing commerciality; and widening access and inclusion.

Public bodies in this way expect these largest organisations to behave as a variant of their own public sector intermediary role. In other words, large organisations must become a ‘nexus’ or conduit between policy bodies and both the public and the network of small independent organisations and artists that make up the sector. This devolution of obligation means these largest organisations and their leaders/managers are implicitly expected to interpret sectoral concerns ‘up’ to public bodies and transmit policy priorities ‘down’ and ‘out’ to other parts of the sector, while also fulfilling their own organisational commitments.

This obligation to behave as leaders in sectoral development is not communicated fully via formal agreements with these largest core funded organisations, leaving this imposed leadership and its priorities as deliberately implicit and subject to a blend of formal requests and informal encouragements, as one theatre officer describes (PM4):

We’ve divided the expectations of our organisations up within how much we fund them so below two-fifty, we wouldn’t really ask much. Whereas the million plus, we would be looking for, they would need to play a sector leadership role. They’d need to mentor new companies, new incoming entrants to the [portfolio of core funded organisations]. They would need to support the [names public body] in public policy, whether that’s our XXX [names a policy] or the stuff we do around sustainability or all sorts of things. [...] not that we’re explicit you know, we might make a case about that in a narrative around the portfolio that that’s why that organisation is being funded but it wouldn’t necessarily make it into the black and white of the contract.

When interviewed, the heads of these large and better funded theatres and companies (the Leaders/Managers) are unaware of these implicit expectations. Their understanding is that they take on these roles as part of their own personal and professional obligations to their community and sector. As a result, they view these sectoral obligations as discretionary rather than mandated.

4.2 The multiple positioning of cultural leaders

Faced with ambiguity and presented with implicit responsibility beyond their employment, the heads of theatre organisations must interpret for themselves what their leadership role entails. Within a challenging financial environment, most describe much of their time as taken up with the survival of their own organisation. Acting in managerial self-interest (AGLE/MITCHELL/SONNENFELD 1999), they manage competing demands by aligning what they consider to be in the sector's best interests with the needs of their own organisation. This statement from an executive producer (LM1) underlines how this works:

'So [company] has now a huge strand of artists development work. [...] [artistic director] had started it before I got there but we together have really expanded that. Both, out of feeling a genuine need that no-one really was doing artist development in the sector generally, the theatre sector in [country] and we really wanted to do that. The other is knowing that, actually if we become really, within the theatre sector as a whole, if [company] was a key part of the artist development network, and therefore to a funder removing that would cause a whole lot of other things to collapse, that's a more difficult choice for a funder to make.'

As part of participant recruitment and to gain insight into perceptions of leadership, each interviewee from the Policymakers and Leaders/Managers participant groups as well as the representative bodies is asked who is leading the theatre sector. This opens up a discussion of what leadership means to these players.

Common figures and organisations within the theatre sector are identified by different participant groups, suggesting a consensus of recognition and collective reinforcement of leadership figures (NISBETT/WALMSLEY 2016). Examples include David Greig, playwright and Artistic Director of the Lyceum in Edinburgh; John McGrath, founder of the National Theatre of Wales; Rachel O'Riordan, then at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff. Participants in England and Wales also refer to commercial West End figures – Sonia Friedman, John Tiffany, etc. Large institutions such as the National Theatres of England, Scotland and Wales are described by public bodies as leaders, however while organisations are named, participants often describe leadership behaviour through the leading figures, e.g., explaining leadership actions by the person Vicki Featherstone from National Theatre of Scotland (NTS) as opposed to the NTS itself. A small number of participants mention particularly influential consultants and journalists such as Lyn Gardner. Quiet or invisible leadership is discussed as a less obvious form of leadership, reflecting understanding of different forms of leadership as well

as distinctions between leadership as both a role of enabler and figure-head for the sector (HEWISON 2006; INGLIS/CRAY 2011; JÄRVINEN/ANSIO/HOUNI 2015; NISBETT/WALMSLEY 2016). The table below illustrates an analysis of the different roles held by those named by participants as leaders.

Participant Group	Policy-makers	Leaders/Managers	Representative Bodies	Total
Artistic Director	20	18	10	48
Artistic Director (Programmer)	6	6	0	12
Company not person	10	26	11	47
Exec Director/Producer	5	2	0	7
Independent Artist	3	5	0	8
Other	3	4	1	8
Total	47	61	22	N/a

Table 1: *Participant perceptions of the location of leadership.*

When asked to describe why or how these people or organisations are leaders, participants are fluid about the person versus the organisation. Individual leadership is embodied in their organisation's actions, with equal emphasis on the artistic programme, the opportunities offered to others and the advocacy they undertake on behalf of the sector. Individuals outside organisations and particularly artists are infrequently named as leaders by the most significant and powerful figures in the sector: Leaders/Managers and Policymakers or representative bodies. However, participants recognise artists as having the capacity to lead through their artistic work (chiming with DOUGLAS/FREMANTLE/DAVIE 2009). A recurring comment from these powerful groups is that the greatest barrier to artists being perceived as, or acting as, leaders is the relationship between their labour and their payment, and artists' inability to be present in settings of influence or visibility. This comment from an Artistic Director (LM9) articulates this barrier:

'I mean, generally, we're living in a world where one of the most precious commodities is time. Yes, we all just do more, and more, and more, and more, and more. And so, if part of the way that things are recognised is the time you give to be present. But for some, that being present is paid for. And for others it's not. Well, of course that's going to create a divide. There is an unequalness in there, isn't there?'

Echoing Caust (2010b), the evidence of this research suggests that only when they become managerial and salaried can artists be leaders. This exposes a system in which existing hierarchies of leadership and organisations are reinforced and the potential for new forms of leadership outside organisations is implicitly suppressed.

By imposition and by perception, leadership is then principally organisational but often described personally, as the work of individuals heading up these organisations. Personal and organisational success are entwined. Organisations rise and fall in status and influence according to who is at the helm. And these organisational heads must work through a series of positions into ever larger or more strategic roles in different organisations to advance their careers. If they reject any moral conflict of interests created by their role, they lose status within a tightly defined hierarchy of positions and institutions, accompanied by a loss of influence and power and often a shift into the precarity of the independent freelance world. The theatre sector is thus highly interdependent but also highly competitive, at both personal and organisational levels.

The articulation of self-interest in cultural leadership is not without moral responsibility. A striking feature that emerged in the data is the high level of personal motivation and feelings of responsibility these organisational heads (Leaders) display towards the sector, the public, audiences, and an often paternalistic concern to protect and support artists. As one executive producer (LM2) put it:

‘It’s not obligation. No I don’t think so. I think it’s just it makes sense. I mean people supported me when I started off so therefore it’s my turn now. I don’t think I must do it. I don’t think I should do it. I think I want to. And therein lies the difference.’

This is a subjective morality, compounded by their belief that their leadership role is discretionary rather than imposed or mandated. Bolstered by self-preservation and desire for advancement, these obligations are described in terms of benevolent duty. Those in the Leaders group describe representing and doing what’s best for smaller organisations and independent artists and producers but this is coloured by a lens of attention to their own careers and organisations rather than by a consultative process with those same players. As a consequence, it is their interpretation of relative salience of different stakeholders that informs which concerns and interests they represent in arenas of policy, programming or funding.

This study demonstrates that despite the collaborative nature of the artform, this is not a relationship of equals (KLEPPE/RØYSENG 2011; KUNST 2015; MANGSET/KLEPPE/RØYSENG 2012; QUACKELS

2017). As one independent artist (A37) observes, their work is dependent on the patronage and interest of these powerful figures but as a result is perpetually compromised:

You kind of have to say you'll do things that they [Artistic Directors] want you to do and then you have to try and find a way of doing what you want to do.

The Artists group of participants lack the protection of a company if they wish to challenge behaviours or change systems. This leads to a suppression of opinion and self-censorship where they cannot be open about their views without being labelled as “troublemakers” and losing support and income. This freelance director (A5) describes the limitations:

I might speak to somebody in a room if they are doing a consultation or something. Would I put my name to something? I don't know, because it's such a competitive industry and if anybody's seen to be stepping out of line of the things that you're allowed to say, that's very dodgy for a freelance artist.

While those from the Policymakers and Leaders groups of participants recognise inequality and diversity as significant issues in theatre, the Artists group and some of the representative bodies point to ongoing underlying behaviours within those other groups that perpetuate these inequalities. Corresponding with Eikhof (2017), this particularly affects marginalised groups (women, people from minority ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities) who see their inclusion in programmes as a form of box-ticking and chasing the zeitgeist rather than changing the way the sector behaves. It is clear however, that these groups lack the power or status to challenge these inequalities.

Artists and the independent producers also interviewed recognise (albeit with cynicism) that the self-interested behaviour of organisations and their leaders or management is driven by the complex stakeholder management they are negotiating. Artists recognise the pressures of the intermediary role of these organisations between artists, funders, audience and community as well as the growth of administration, “best practice” and mundane issues like running buildings. This freelance playwright (A38) connects these multiple obligations to their lack of capacity to innovate:

‘my feeling is that the large institutions have lots of responsibilities to big audiences, to Boards too, and it makes it harder for them to generate new ways of doing things.’

Ultimately cultural leaders’ duties as employees to their organisation and to their organisation’s funder(s) will trump any moral or artistic obligation beyond their walls. It is their assessment of the value of different

players in the sector which determines the attention each receives. As they view their sectoral leadership as discretionary, it is easier to shape, prioritise or abandon any obligations according to their own interests.

4.3 Attitudes to risk and innovation

The imposition of leadership and the resulting reinforcement of existing organisations and sectoral hierarchies leads to a suppression or removal of risk from the systems of cultural production in UK theatre. This study identified multiple ways in which risk is interpreted formally and informally by the different players in the sector.

Examining the strategy documents (*Arts Council England* 2013; *Arts Council of Northern Ireland* 2013; *Arts Council of Wales* 2013; *Creative Scotland* 2014) from the four public bodies, there is little definition of risk or innovation, reflecting once again their deliberate ambiguity (GRAY 2015). Notwithstanding the varying remit of these bodies (spanning multiple arts disciplines, film, digital and creative industries, museums and libraries), these terms “risk” and “innovation” are used descriptively to signal a number of desires:

- adventurousness and innovation in artistic practice;
- and new models or ways of working that improve sustainability or create new approaches to the business of making art.

Public bodies (or the Policymakers group) argue that innovation is necessary to deal with changing audience tastes (digitisation, the influence of film/TV/On-demand and ongoing reductions of public investment). They argue that a “wholesale rethinking” is needed to how cultural activity is made and sustained (*Arts Council of Wales* 2013: 23). This priority for change contradicts their behaviour which is to reinforce and increase the power of existing organisations and leaderships. Data from this study suggests that risk within cultural industries and theatre specifically, can be seen as having three forms.

The first is that already described above: risk as a form of artistic and organisational experimentation (DOUGLAS/FREMANTLE/DAVIE 2009; HALLAM/INGOLD 2008). Scholars have recognised this as an essential part of creative or cultural production (BANKS et al. 2000). In this study, it is described by participants as the creation of new or different theatre works and practices and the emergence of new artists and production models. Adaptive structures, a profusion of collaborative approaches and restructuring of public funding are markers of the business or organisational aspect. Growth in diversity and representation, disrup-

tion of traditional forms and cross-artform practices are artistic signifiers. All participants from all three groups identify the independent, fringe artistic community as the source of the most vibrant or most innovative new approaches, both in making work and experimenting with business models. This is not to suggest that only artists can innovate (PRATT 2015) but it does suggest that large “vertically integrated” organisations are less likely to be a source than “cultural entrepreneurs working in micro or small enterprises” (BANKS et al. 2000: 463). Reflecting Sgourev (2013), many of the Artists group articulate a subjectivity in attitudes to innovation among organisations and public bodies; that out-of-date organisations with little capacity for adaptiveness, remain bound within narrow definitions of the dominant canon and how it is to be performed (predominantly white, able-bodied and male) and interpret what is “ground-breaking” accordingly:

‘They [Artistic Directors] feel responsible only for continuing maybe a kind of great sort of legacy tradition and doing what they consider to be innovative. And surprise, surprise, what they consider to be innovative is often pushing their own work or the work of their kind of male colleagues who experience the same amount of privilege.’ (A11)

The lack of fluidity described by participants within structures of cultural production is understood as necessary due to multiple stakeholder demands and self-preservation. However, it also emphasises that risk as artistic and organisational experimentation, cannot be embraced without disrupting those structures. Additionally, the Artists group see the multiple interests the Leaders are trying to satisfy as leading to an underlying cautiousness and cultural conservatism that limits reputational, commercial and artistic risk in programming. An example is this discussion by artist participants in a focus group:

A36: They [Artistic/Executive Directors] want work which is not going to... definitely not going to startle or offend an audience, which isn’t to say that they’re not going to allow any striking imagery within a piece of writing or on the stage, but they... Only if it’s going to, sort of, preach to the choir, if that makes sense, that the theatre audience is going to be ostensibly, sort of...

A35: lefty, liberal.

A36: Yes, kind of...

A35: It’s very safe at the moment.

The second form is risk as it relates to accountability and measures of protecting public money and public benefit. Public bodies and the organisations they fund are endowed with a custodianship of public interest in which concepts of best practice emphasise risk-averse governance and

administratively dominant processes (CAUST 2010a). The growth of public management and accountability with reducing public funds creates a risk averse approach to public policy and subsidy and influences behaviours towards experimentation (SGOUREV 2013; STEPHAN/PATHAK 2016). This is not only clearly understood by all the participants in this study but accepted as a normal part of how public funding and the sector operates. As one Policymaker participant (PM4) says,

‘Everybody’s looking at a way of passing on or mitigating risk. Well it’s [risk] moving down, so local authorities are putting it on to buildings and buildings are putting it on to companies and companies are putting it on to independent artists.’

In response to the demands of public management, public bodies privilege organisational structures, administrative systems and business models over looser forms of cultural production and impose ever tighter controls on outputs, outcomes and targets. One participant (A10) describes this as ‘becoming bonsai trees’ to fit into funding programmes. This reflects an attitude among artists that it is *they* who must change, suppress, adapt to fit the funding programme or the artistic programming of theatres organisations. Despite the championing of experimentation in their strategies, public bodies justify their own decision-making and satisfy the bureaucratic systems that dominate their own survival by reinforcing existing organisational hierarchies and practices through funding and imposing sectoral leadership.

The third form of risk recognised is precarity. Although directly connected to the risk-averse behaviours of funders and organisations described above, and despite being raised by almost every one of the 84 participants in the study as a major issue in theatre in the UK, this form of risk barely appears in the strategic documents reviewed. Within the structures and hierarchies described by participants in the study, the Artists group in this study are left to shoulder the artistic, financial and emotional risks associated with cultural production (BAKHSHI/WINDSOR 2015; COMUNIAN/FAGGIAN/JEWELL 2011; HESMONDHALGH/BAKER 2010; KLEPPE 2017b; MANGSET et al. 2017). Reflected in this artist participant’s observation (A25), the pressure to simply exist within this system leaves little space to question these hierarchies or even consider whether they as individuals accept the dominant forms of success and career progression:

[...] if you look at the people who are on the outside of the system, I think quite a lot of those people are people who can’t take risks of their own, who have a difficult time being able to take risks because it takes a lot of their time and energy to make theatre. And the riskier it is, the more likely they are to not be able to take that step

towards, not necessarily the system, but towards the centre of the theatre world. I mean, I suppose that also makes the assumption, though, that everyone's goal is to make their way towards the centre of the theatre world.

While the Leaders group express high levels of concern for independent artists and their precarity, the Artists group do not feel this care, and often emphasise the transactional nature of their relationships with theatre organisations. Their exchanges are dominated by business dealings rather than creative exploration, and they find themselves negotiating ever-diminishing commissions, co-productions or access to resources. Artists and independent producer participants describe their own precarity as in no small part due to their dependency for their status on the favour of those same Leaders (again corresponding with QUACKELS 2017). This inhibits artists' ability to reject or criticise existing hierarchies within the theatre sector. If they are ambitious and wish to be seen as leaders themselves, they must seek the endorsement of the existing sector leadership. Little space is left for transgressive or disruptive behaviours.

5. Implications

Public cultural bodies have a contradiction at the heart of their own policies. Their stated desire for risk, innovation and change is informed by their appraisal of the sector's future needs. It is however, subverted by their actions which reinforce existing organisations, their leadership and their models of cultural production. If arts and cultural policy is implicit and enacted through behaviours (GRAY 2015; MANGSET 2018) then this study suggests either that the actual policy is to maintain and bolster existing organisations and assign them greater power, or that written strategies and thus explicit policies promoting innovation have failed before they have begun.

Imposed sectoral leadership on large well-funded organisations can be argued as a legitimate expectation of return on public investment however, it acts as a form of policy justification by bolstering each public bodies' decisions. At the same time, it limits the independence of the sector's leadership. If the leadership of the theatre sector is mandated by the principal public body and is dependent on that body for its own survival, its ability to speak and act for the sector is fundamentally compromised. In effect this process cuts independent and freelance cultural

labour out of a system of leadership and policy influence and in doing so limits what change is possible.

Examining how this affects the evolution of cultural production, the gap in sustainable livelihood, status and influence between those in salaried leadership positions and those outside organisations is evident. The persistence of this inequality is inhibiting new forms of leadership and new approaches to production. The duality and complexity of cultural leadership and particularly the performing arts has been examined as an approach to sharing and diffusing the power of leadership (INGLIS/CRAY 2011; REYNOLDS/TONKS/MACNEILL 2017). The data from this study suggests that inadequate attention is being paid to how public policy and management (in itself a nexus of government and sector interests) is disrupting the ethical behaviours of cultural leadership and encouraging narrow vertical hierarchies of compromised leadership rather than disruptive or transgressive forms. Cultural leadership is at present a dysfunctional “nexus of contracts” (HILL/JONES 1992), guided by its dominant stakeholders and compromised by self-interest on multiple levels. The dependency of independent artists and cultural labour on the discretionary benevolence and endorsement of these leaders renders the system of cultural production in UK theatre unequal on an ongoing basis rather than enabling change.

Analysis of the data in this study suggests that the three forms of risk articulated previously – innovation, risk as part of accountability and risk as precarity – are fundamentally entwined. A risk-averse system of policymaking reinforces its decision-making by elevating those it already supports, devolving sector development to them, and increasing their accountability. It pushes risk and experimentation out of the funding system and funded organisations and onto independents and freelancers within the sector. This risk-aversion inhibits any possibility for existing structures to be disrupted and suppresses the very innovation it sets out to achieve. The more risk is passed to individuals outside organisations where they are unprotected by companies, salaries or boards, the more they are rendered unequal in the sector’s transactions. This reinforces the very inequality and precarity so often acknowledged but rarely tackled at policy level. If the desired outcome to promoting leadership, risk and innovation is to increase sustainability, the complicity of both public bodies and cultural leadership in reinforcing precarity and inequality renders it impossible.

6. Conclusion

This research suggests that there is a contradiction between policy desires for innovation and risk-taking and the manner in which public funding policies assign leadership to the largest and least adaptive organisations. If sustainability is the intended outcome of the promotion of leadership, risk and innovation, then this promotion must move away from existing organisational models of leadership within funding systems. In particular, more investigation is needed into how the dominant public management environment can be resisted to encourage more fluid approaches to risk and experimentation.

Cultural leaders are compromised as they attempt to satisfy multiple stakeholder commitments and thus complicit in reinforcing both precarity and existing hierarchies. This study suggests greater attention is needed to how dominant stakeholder interests and particularly the influence of the state as a stakeholder alters the ethical behaviours of cultural leadership and leads to a growth of inequality between those in organisations and those outside them in the system of cultural production. While artists are dependent on organisations and their leaders, the entire system of cultural production is dependent on artistic labour. This interdependency is under-recognised and a rebalancing of perceived dependencies and corresponding value is needed.

Innovation is a process of improvisation, trying out hunches and experimenting (DOUGLAS/FREMANTLE/DAVIE 2009; HALLAM/INGOLD 2007). It thrives in cultural systems that are more tolerant of uncertainty and risk-taking (STEPHAN/PATHAK 2016). Unless the influence of risk-averse policies on the assignment of cultural leadership is recognised, the desire for new and alternate innovative models of cultural production will remain just that – a desire.

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