

Policy Brief

Performing Leadership Differently: Co-creating Collective Strategies for Change

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KEY INFO

Research question: How can arts, social science researchers and creative communities co-create models of participatory leadership and engagement for BAME and working-class communities within creative industries after COVID-19?

Policy area or themes

- Creative Industries
- Skills and Training
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Methods: Qualitative interviews, extended case method, and workshops; total number of people engaged with: Through project: 100; via STAF (Something to Aim For): 500

Geographical area: UK-wide, focus on London

Research stage: Completed

Summary of the research

As O'Brien and others have shown, the arts and creative sectors are characterised by a high degree of class privilege and racial and cultural hierarchies [cf. [Panic Report](#), [Creative Majority](#), 2017, 2019, 2020].

This prompts the research question: How can arts, social science researchers and creative communities build back better creative industries after COVID-19 by co-creating models of participatory leadership and engagement for BAME and working-class communities?

The project's researchers (Dr. Amitabh Rai, Dr. Will Essilfie) engaged with artists, organisations and audience initiatives across England with a focus on London, through our partner organisation Something To Aim For (STAF), a sector support organisation aiming to increase diverse engagement in the arts and to support centralising voices on the fringes. We interviewed around 20 'key figures' in the sector, workshoped with around 70, and through our blog and partner organisation network (24,000 people in the STAF network) reached about 500 more. Our aim was to get collective and strategic diagrams for substantive organisational and sector-wide change into a kind of creative commons for BAME and working class creatives struggling to establish a toe-hold in the white dominated and elitist cultural and creative sectors.

A central focus of our collaborative work was a consideration of care, mental health, and intersectionality, even as we considered in more depth race and class dynamics in the arts. We interviewed 17 senior arts administrators and cultural organisers and set up online and in person workshops and strategy diagramming sessions with Diverse Actions, Barbican Stories, Sex with Cancer, Arts Council England (numbers of people engaged with through the workshops: 100) in order to plan strategic change for their

organisations and the sector that would support a more diverse workforce, relevant leadership, and authentic community engagement.

We critically explored new leadership models, using participatory action research and the extended case methods in order to foster substantive participation by diverse stakeholders. Participatory action research involves authentic co-creation of aims and strategies for change with diverse communities; the extended case method allows for strategic organisational processes such as administration in and of the arts to be situated historically and within their eco-systems. In contrast to previous arts diversity initiatives, the project therefore embedded those systematically excluded from leadership within the arts at every stage of the research process.

Policy recommendations

Within the **Creative Industries Workforce** policy area:

1. Need for system-wide and mental health-informed mentoring for creatives of colour, Black and working class creatives. Funds should be allocated to establish autonomous mentor networks of minority, intergenerational, and working class mentors; these mentor networks would be funded to develop mentor-mentee best practices and organisational experiments. This can incorporate the several models of mentoring covered in O'Brien et al (2021): peer to peer, intergenerational, anti-elitist, group, process-oriented mentorship programs. This will immediately and in the long-term address the absence of care for working class and Black and of colour creatives in the arts sector by focusing human resources strategy on relevant community outreach, leadership development and retention, and cultural co-creation.

2. Protection for interns and structures to prevent BAME and working class freelancers having to work for free. A BAME and working class Internship program should be creative for the arts and cultural sector. These internship programs would happen along the lines of the PLD research process—co-create with a dynamic sector intermediary organisation working on EDI strategy an action research agenda to respond to today's urgencies and sustainable strategies for equality and diversity. This would be the general format for all the paid internships funded through this program.

3. Infrastructures of care within the industry. This involves: participatory models of leadership, circular model of leadership, collective models of leadership, slow and non-linear leadership or arts organising. Our research has highlighted the importance of moving beyond cliches of care and concern toward concrete strategies of resource allocation, authentic co-creation, and leadership development that attends to the massive and widespread inequalities of race and class that continue to characterise the arts in UK. By infrastructures of care we mean the creation of funding bodies that will support BAME and working class networks of artists and cultural organisers seeking to make substantive change in their sectors; we mean a commitment to diversity that involves rapid diversity audits of everything from boards of trustees to the maintenance staff, social audits that showcase the care deficits that are the lived conditions of inequality and injustice in the arts today.

For the **Cultural Policy** area:

4. A Permanent Commission on Fair Work in the Arts with an initial remit to focus on freelance work and destabilising precarity: This is needed because as O'Brien et al (2021) have noted, a kind of government watchdog co-created with precarious part-time creative workers is necessary to address the urgent, post-Covid needs of these workers, a disproportionate number of whom are BAME and working class. This Permanent Commission would be housed at DCMS; with an initial remit to submit policy recommendations around the current condition of freelancers with a specific focus on race and class hierarchies.

All these PLD Policy recommendations have to be authentically co-created. Indeed, all policy processes should include a consideration of strategic leadership pathways so that people from marginalised

communities can articulate from their own perspectives their conditions of care and professional development in the creative industries.

Key findings

Our interviews with key decision-makers identified several urgent needs of minority creatives and emergent leadership practices:

1. Creating lasting organisational, and sector-wide change requires the lens of intersectional (relational and historical) justice and practices of radical care (e.g. organisational/sector change strategy through anti-racist cultural organising and admin of care-budgets at STAF). In every part of the creative sector, in every cultural organization and in every struggle for intersectional justice in the arts and culture industries, co-creating the conditions for long-term, sustained transformations of class bias and systemic racism has to be, first, explored in all its specific complexities through participatory action-oriented research and, second, needs to be actioned collectively through new models of leadership;
2. Understanding better the complex politics and ethics of allyship in participatory action research (i.e., the limits and possibilities of authentic co-creation);
3. Understanding better Trustee Boards's accountability and role in creating and transforming and/or sustaining the conditions of just and transformative leadership and equitable conditions of work across raced and classed networks of artists, producers, and organisational strategists;
4. The need to democratise arts and cultural organisations's Admin common bureaucratic expertise (i.e making accessible different kinds of strategic knowledge, discourse, jargon), and, when appropriate, widen participation in organisational admin;
5. How to study collectively and better the conditions of sustainable mentoring relations and support processes for BAME and working class creatives in the context of institutional racism and white supremacy and a mythological British 'meritocracy'?
6. A radical revaluation of informal knowledges and emergent or marginalised leadership practices (validation of that as critical knowledge and as life-based expertise);
7. Viability of critical CIAO studies BA apprenticeships in this sector;
8. Complexities of Public sector/cultural organisation collaborations: limits and possibilities of authentic co-creation.

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