Co-leadership: an opportunity for the UK cultural sector to increase leadership diversity and impact

Dr Claire Antrobus, January 2023

Introduction

When facing difficult challenges or complex problems it is often said two heads are better than one. Co-leadership is the embodiment of this approach, as a pair of leaders work together to share responsibility for guiding an organisation. Despite the challenges facing leaders of cultural organisations today never having been more demanding, many organisations still prefer to appoint a single leader. A decade ago, when I began my research into co-leadership, one theatre leader I interviewed quoted Shakespeare to support their claim that power sharing is inherently flawed, there must be one person ultimately in charge: "an two men ride / of a horse, one must ride behind" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, 3:5, 36-67). Management consultancy guru Marvin Bower, founder of McKinsey Consulting, is reported to have shared this view: "power sharing never works" he told a major bank considering a co-CEO-model (Feigen et al., 2022).[1] However, there is growing interest in co-leadership across a range of sectors, as a strategy to widen the leadership capabilities and perspectives available to organisations facing unparalleled challenges in this VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) operating environment. Studies beyond the cultural sector have demonstrated that in complex organisations co-leadership improves organisational performance and supports the development of leaders (Belasen et al., 2021). When co-leadership increases diversity, providing this diversity is complementary and well-managed, then it can lead to greater innovation, richer solutions and increased productivity (Fanshawe, 2021). Whilst the numbers involved are still small, one recent study in the corporate sector suggests companies with co-CEOs can demonstrate a commercial advantage (Feigen et al., 2022).

Equally importantly, in the UK cultural sector, the senior executives in leadership roles too often do not reflect the diversity of our wider society in terms of ethnicity, gender or disability. There is both a moral imperative and a strong business case to end this discrimination. Various studies have demonstrated that diversity of the workforce is associated with improved performance, particularly in terms of innovation (Fanshawe, 2021). Consequently our cultural organisations are not accessing the full range of talent available for leadership at time when we need the best talent to chart a course through these very troubled waters. Co-leadership is beginning to be viewed by commentators internationally in healthcare, higher education, business, the third sector and cultural sector as a vehicle for enabling greater diversity in leadership (Antrobus, 2011; Feigen et al., 2022; Belasen et al., 2021; Watton et al., 2022). Others go further still, suggesting co-leadership is a vehicle for evolving a more inclusive and effective organisational culture (Chary, 2022; Feigen et al., 2022; Rising Arts Agency, 2021).

This research therefore explores the potential of co-leadership as an option for the UK cultural sector which is suited to the current operating context, not least because it is more inclusive. Co-leadership is defined as the professional collaboration of two or more people to undertake a senior executive role as a sub-set of plural leadership. Plural leadership includes team and collective leadership groups, what we might call 'co-operatives' in the cultural sector, and is part of wider theory which sees "leadership not as a property of individuals and their behaviors, but as a collective phenomenon that is distributed or shared among different people, potentially fluid, and constructed in interaction" (Denis et al. 2012, p.212). In the UK cultural sector, plural leadership has also been described as 'multiplying leadership' (Robinson, 2020). An underlying ethos of collaborative

leadership unites these approaches, premised on power-sharing, 'distributing' or recognising leadership widely within and beyond institutions. Some commentators position plural leadership as an alternative to the traditional, heroic, command-and-control transactional leadership model which has colonial and patriarchal connotations (Chary, 2022, Rising Arts Agency, 2021). Co-leadership is usually understood to refer to role sharing at the CEO-level, although it is sometimes used to refer to other senior leadership positions. Whilst job-sharing or other forms of flexible working can be facilitated by co-leadership, and often occurs as part co-leadership arrangements, it is not an essential aspect of co-leadership.

Since the early 1990s, in the UK theatre sector, the CEO role has often been shared between two co-CEO roles with complementary skills and distinct but overlapping responsibilities; the Artistic Director (AD) and Executive Director (ED).[2] These posts are often equal in terms of authority and full-time, with both reporting directly to the board. The AD/ED model has spread, to a lesser extent, to other parts of the cultural sector including visual art galleries and dance companies during the last ten years, as the growing complexity of the operating environment has necessitated a broader range of skills and greater capacity than can be found in a single leader. The solo leader model, however, continues to be the default outside the theatre sector.

Notwithstanding the additional complexity around recruitment and succession planning for co-leadership, and occasional difficulties when individual relationships between AD/ED break down, the co-leadership model is well understood and widely practised as the norm in the theatre sector in the UK and internationally (Reid & Fjellvær, 2023; Antrobus 2011). Co-leadership, where an organisational/business lead shares overall responsibility with a technical lead, also occurs more widely in a number of other sectors including newspaper publishing, healthcare, education and technology – both in start-ups and in larger enterprises such as Google (Denis et al., 2012). Academic studies of this form of leadership have found that the model is favoured in contexts where a strategic balance of potentially competing interests or stakeholders is required.

In my initial research I found co-leadership offered cultural organisations many benefits including fostering a collaborative and innovative culture, improving the quality of decision-making, increasing both leadership capacity and the range of capabilities, and greater business continuity (Antrobus, 2011). I also concluded that co-leadership was a particularly effective choice in times of major change and for first-time leaders, as it offered a more supportive and developmental environment. I argued that co-leadership could potentially enable job-sharing and flexibility which could increase workforce diversity, although I had not found any examples of this at that stage.

In the intervening decade, leadership roles have only become more demanding and we have seen an increase in leaders stepping down from roles which come at too high a cost to their health and personal life (Gould, 2022). These intense working conditions impact leaders with caring responsibilities, health issues or disabilities most keenly. Whilst there has been some progress in diversifying the profile of the workforce, those in leadership positions in the publicly-funded arts and cultural sector still do not fully reflect the demographic diversity of the UK (Carey et al., 2021; Parker 2020).[3] Working as a leadership development professional during this decade I have regularly encountered leaders who chose not to apply for unrealistic and inflexible executive roles, and others who, due to structural racism, ableism or sexism in the cultural sector, have been unable to develop the experience demanded. Moreover, as a leadership consultant I have also worked with boards that, whilst recognising the need to broaden the profile of who they recruit into senior roles, see co-leadership roles as inherently more risky or costly. Some boards, as well as potential executive candidates, hold heroic and arguably unrealistic assumptions about 'what it takes' to successfully lead an organisation in terms of competencies or personal resilience that prevent real workforce change happening.

The dramatic impact of COVID-19 on cultural organisations' business models and staff wellbeing, and the widespread recognition, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, that the under-representation of Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people at a senior leadership level in publicly-funded arts organisations requires urgent attention, has led to a new wave of interest in co-leadership. The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) announced the appointment of its first co-Artistic Directors in 2022, following a growing trend that includes Royal Exchange Manchester and Paines Plough among others. More widely in the cultural sector, organisations are recruiting co-leaders for the first time, for example the appointment of Zak Mensah and Sara Wajid at Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) who are the first co-CEOs of a major UK museum group as well as the first Black and Asian leaders of the institution (Kendall Adams, 2020). This recent wave of interest extends beyond the AD/ED model, although we are also seeing a wider range of organisations exploring that option. Increasingly, as the case studies in this report highlight, recent adopters of co-leadership in the cultural sector are experimenting with less familiar models including co-CEO part-time job-shares; co-CEO models that avoid the executive/artistic binary and co-AD models.

Structure of the report

This report explores the potential role of increasing co-leadership opportunities in changing who applies for, and is appointed to, senior roles in the cultural sector. It seeks to establish how co-leadership might address some of the barriers to progression into leadership roles that currently prevent Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people, women and disabled people being fully represented at the executive level. It draws on existing research into co-leadership and diversity, from a range of sectors internationally including healthcare, higher education, non-profits and business, as well as presenting new research gathered from a survey, interviews and case studies in collected in autumn 2022. The report is structured in five sections:

1. **Section one** reviews the evidence of the leadership challenges facing the cultural sector and the barriers to greater workforce diversity at an executive level. It presents new data gathered from a survey of early and mid-career professionals who are under-represented at a senior executive level in terms of disability, gender or ethnicity.
2. **Section two** considers the benefits of co-leadership, drawing on academic research supplemented by interviews with current co-leaders and their Boards, highlighting how co-leadership is well-placed to respond to both the challenges facing the sector, and the specific challenges around increasing leadership diversity.
3. **Section three** sets out the conditions required for co-leadership to work well, outlining the implications for recruitment, support and development, and wider working practices. It draws on existing evidence from other sectors and previous studies of the cultural sector, which is supplemented with further examples from the case studies. It also considers what can go wrong with co-leadership and summarises the key risks and how they can be avoided, drawing on the experience of those who have successfully managed co-leadership and those with negative experiences. A series of case studies supplements this section, providing 11 examples of current co-leadership models in a range of cultural organisations in Appendix II.
4. **Section four** explores how co-leadership might be more widely deployed, describing what limits co-leadership currently and identifying the common features in those organisations who have recently adopted co-leadership. This section draws on interviews with sector specialists, individual leaders and Trustees, and the workforce survey.
5. **Section five** summarises the key findings from across the four preceding sections and suggests implications for Boards, funders, and those involved in leadership development and recruitment.

Throughout the report there are a number of tables, and one chart, summarising the data collected:

Item	Title	Page
Table 1	The leadership context for UK cultural organisations in the 2020s	9
Table 2	Factors contributing to lack of diversity at leadership level in the cultural sector	17
Table 3	Summary of benefits of co-leadership for each case study organisation	19
Table 4	The leadership context and benefits of co-leadership compared	24
Table 5	Factors contributing to lack of diversity compared with co-leadership benefits	25
Table 6	Features of effective co-leadership relationships	27
Table 7	How co-leadership arrangements emerged in the case study organisations	30
Chart 1	How case study roles were advertised	39
Table 8	Summary of the context for opting for co-leadership and what enabled it in the case study organisations	41

There are also a number of Appendices, as follows:

I. A summary of the organisational features of the case study organisations p.52
II. Individual case studies from eleven organisations p.53
III. A list of individuals interviewed p.78
IV. Breakdown of survey respondents and interviewees p.79
V. Bibliography p.80

Methodology

The report draws on existing research which has been supplemented with semi-structured interviews and a survey. A more detailed breakdown of the demographic profile of survey respondents and interviewees is provided in Appendix IV. This report considers the under-representation of women, people who are Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse and disabled people in executive leadership roles because, in terms of the characteristics protected under the UK Equalities Act (2010), this is where we see greatest discrepancy between the workforce and wider population. This is not to suggest that other individuals do not experience discrimination and it is also important to acknowledge that individuals are often impacted by multiple and compound disadvantage. Recent studies have particularly highlighted the inequalities around socio-economic class (Brook, 2020; Wreyford et al., 2021) which is clearly another major inequality in the cultural sector, and one which often intersects with other forms of discrimination. Given it would be impossible to do justice to the complexity of issues, I have chosen to focus on those protected characteristics in the UK Equalities Act (2010) which are most under-represented in the sector's senior workforce.

As regards terminology, when referring to people who experience racism I have used the term 'Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse' throughout the report, except when talking about specific individuals who have chosen to describe themselves differently or when directly quoting third

parties. Whilst acknowledging some people prefer people-first terminology, and that some d/Deaf and Neurodivergent people prefer the term ‘d/Deaf, Neurodivergent and Disabled’, I have opted to refer to 'disabled people' throughout. At times, when referring collectively to women, disabled people and Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people I’ve used the phrase ‘those minoritised in leadership positions’ as this acknowledges people are actively minoritised by others rather than naturally existing as a minority (Yasmin Gunaratnum, 2003 cited in Wreyford et. Al, 2021, p.36).

Literature review

Existing research into co-leadership and the lack of diversity at senior leadership levels in the UK cultural sector was reviewed. There is relatively little published academic research in either domain, although there is a comprehensive account of co-leadership in the arts due to be published by Routledge in 2023 to which I was generously given pre-publication access by the authors (Reid and Fjellvær, 2023). Studies of the lack of diversity in the cultural and creative sectors often consider the whole workforce, rather than focussing on career progression and leadership barriers, hence my decision to undertake a survey. I have drawn on a range of secondary sources exploring leadership development needs in the cultural and wider non-profit sector. It is widely acknowledged that the increased focus on social and workforce inequalities as a result of the renewal of the Black Lives Matter movement, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, as well as the social and economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the leadership context so I have considered recent rapid-response articles from 2020 onwards, as well as some slightly older, more comprehensive studies from the past decade.

Given that increasing diversity at a leadership level is a concern for many organisations beyond the cultural sector, I had expected to find more research about co-leadership and diversity. I was able to locate two academic papers exploring job-sharing and co-leadership as mechanisms for increasing gender diversity in the higher education and healthcare sectors as well as some shorter accounts of co-leadership examples in higher education and US non-profits.

The published data around the cultural sector workforce is fragmented, and the disruption to employment during COVID-19, when much of the UK cultural workforce was furloughed, complicates the picture further. Data from official sector surveys has therefore been supplemented with reports exploring aspects of workforce diversity and inequality. Some of this data is sub-sectoral (e.g. museums sector) and the scope of the ‘sector’ varies from the whole of the creative industries to only those organisations regularly funded by the Arts Council in England. Some data is UK-wide, but most is England-specific and I have not included the policy and funding context of the UK devolved nations within the scope of section one.

Surveys

Two surveys were created with support from an external research specialist Dr Melita Armitage. The first targeted early and mid-career professionals under-represented at executive level (people who are Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse, disabled people and women). This survey was concerned with perceptions of leadership, experiences of co-leadership and barriers to career progression. It was circulated widely via partner networks including the Weston Jerwood Bursary Programme, Clore Leadership Programme newsletter, Museum Detox and my own social media networks. The survey attracted a good response level and the many detailed comments provided contextual information that rendered unnecessary the follow-up interviews I had initially planned and enabled me to reallocate resource to the Trustee perspective.

Ninety-four people completed the co-leadership workforce survey. The second survey intended to collect information about executive recruitment in the past three years from Trustees, as well as wider perceptions of leadership, including co-leadership. Despite similar efforts to promote this

survey, and the promise of anonymity in respect of the sensitive nature of the topics, there was a disappointing response with only six completed surveys. Therefore, I undertook six in-depth Trustee interviews instead, as well as interviewing five executive recruitment specialists to better understand current recruitment practice and attitudes to leadership amongst boards.

Interviews and case studies

Fifteen independent sector specialists with expertise in executive recruitment, leadership and/or diversity were interviewed about barriers to career progression and perceptions of co-leadership. These interviews also helped identify potential case studies and relevant literature. Interviewees included people in my professional networks and people who contacted me in response to a call-out for contributions in September 2022. A full list of those who contributed is included as Appendix III.

From initial desk research and the suggestions of these 15 independent specialists, around 30 individual leaders involved in co-leadership were then contacted to participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored how their leadership model worked, how the model had been formed and/or recruited into, the benefits of co-leadership to them as leaders and their organisations, and the challenges of co-leadership. Not everyone contacted responded, which is to be expected, not least as this research coincided with the triennial Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio funding cycle which pre-occupied many arts leaders during Autumn 2022. A total of 20 individuals were interviewed from 16 different organisations. In selecting the individuals to approach I sought out organisations whose leadership pairings included women, people who are Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse and disabled people. The vast majority of these interviewees are named and acknowledged in Appendix III, although four remain anonymous to protect the identity of their organisations.

Eleven of the organisations were selected and gave permission to be case studies, one of these is based in Scotland and one works UK-wide, the other nine are based in England. In most cases I spoke with both co-leaders together, although for practical reasons on two occasions I only interviewed one co-leader and on two occasions I spoke with the chair of trustees rather than the staff members. A full list of case study organisations is included as Appendix I. An additional four anonymous organisations are used as case studies for the section exploring problems with co-leadership. In total, six trustees were interviewed, four of whom are anonymous to protect the identity of their organisations. In response to advice from one of the leadership/ diversity specialists, Sarah Davies, any self-employed interviewees were offered payment to enable their contribution.

Acknowledgements
This research has been undertaken under the guidance of Dr Jonathan Price, School of Performance and Cultural Industries, University of Leeds and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and Clore Leadership Programme. I would also like to acknowledge the informal guidance and support provided by Sandeep Mahal MBE and Dawn Cameron, who have provided feedback, encouragement and suggestions as the research developed, as well as to thank all the interviewees and survey respondents.

Section 1: The context for co-leadership in the UK cultural sector

1.1 The leadership landscape

The demands on cultural organisations and their leaders today, and the vast array of skills needed to respond to those pressures, are greater than ever. Many of the challenges faced by cultural organisations are common to other sectors, and in particular the wider UK non-profit sector, although the cultural sector's particular context creates additional pressures due to a lack of skills, diversity and capacity (Kings College London, 2018). Globally, leaders in commercial, non-profit and governmental organisations are facing a technological revolution, a relentless pace of change, growing complexity in stakeholder relations, and climate change (Hawkins, 2017). Hawkins argues that this context necessitates inter-organisational leadership of ecosystems rather than teams, values-driven and ethical leadership, embracing complex diversity in the workforce and positioning the leader as a developer of others and enabler of innovation. He argues for a shift to collective or collaborative leadership: the process of engaging collective intelligence across organisational boundaries, away from heroic leadership, where a single individual is considered responsible for organisational success.

Specifically within the cultural sector, leaders are juggling financial uncertainty and the need to evolve new business models whilst staying true to charitable objectives. They also face a drive towards greater relevance and reach, increased expectations around social impact, and demands for transparency (Kings College London, 2018; Arts Council England, 2020). Similar challenges are identified for non-profit leaders more widely; in particular there is an increased focus on power-sharing and involvement in decision-making, greater accountability, enabling social connection and building trust among communities (Civil Society Futures, 2018). The UK cultural sector lacks capacity for development, particularly in terms of workforce diversity and skills around digital innovation, and there is under-investment in creative development and artistic risk-taking (Bolton et al., 2010; Arts Council England, 2020). Inequalities in cultural participation are perceived to be among the most critical challenges (Arts Council England, 2020), and commentators highlight a correlation between diversity, or lack of it, at executive level and among participants and audiences (Brook et al., 2020; Cameron, 2021). Implications for cultural leadership include a shift towards a less-hierarchical organisational culture, a pressing need for greater diversity in the senior workforce in terms of ethnicity, gender and disability, the development of emotional intelligence and relationship-building skills to enable broad networks and equitable partnerships, adaptability and the ability to be accountable, build trust and work ethically (Kings College London, 2018).

The cultural sector clearly has a problem with diversity, not only in terms of the reach of its activities, but equally in terms of its workforce and governance. People who are Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse, women and disabled people are under-represented in organisational leadership positions (Wreyford et al., 2021).[4] Looking at 2020/21 data from ACE for organisations it regularly funds (National Portfolio Organisations, or NPOs), 14% of ACE NPO employees were Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse, compared with 17% in the working-age population in England for the same period. Focussing on the organisations in receipt of the largest grants of over £1 million, the Band 3 NPOs, only 10% of their workforce is reported to be Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse and only 6% disabled. Across all NPOs only 7% of employees were disabled, compared with 23% in the working age population. In the headline figures, women appear over-represented in the workforce, although this not reflected at senior levels, and particularly not in artistic leadership roles, as has been noted in other studies (Brook et al., 2020).[5]

Beneath the headline figures there is also significant variation between sub-sectors as well as between organisations of different scales. For example, Cameron (2021) finds the Creative People and Places workforce is more representative than their wider NPO counterparts in terms of ethnicity

and disability. In contrast, museums have particularly low levels of Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse employees and, as Parker (2020) highlighted in the Inc Arts 1% Challenge campaign, there were no Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse leaders among the top twenty funded arts organisations in the UK. Leadership workforce data is not available for the ACE National Portfolio in 2020/21, due to the disruption of COVID-19 when many organisations furloughed staff and funder reporting requirements were suspended, but the previous year's figures reveal a pattern where inequalities increase with seniority (Arts Council England, 2021).[6] Whilst ACE reports improvements in workforce diversity year on year, there is still a long way to go to achieve better representation, particularly in terms of disability and ethnicity (Arts Council England 2021; Arts Council England 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the renewed focus on tackling inequalities as a result of movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, have increased the challenges but also created opportunities for leaders of UK cultural organisations. Even with the unparalleled public investment in recovery funding across the UK, COVID-19 damaged organisational and personal resilience.[7] Financial reserves have been diminished and permanent staff roles have been lost in many organisations (Mohan, 2022; Walmsley et al., 2022). The cost-of-living crisis, precipitated by the pandemic, the impact of Brexit and war in Ukraine, are all making it harder to balance organisational and individual budgets. Several studies published since 2020 shine light on the scale, complexity and range of considerations facing those in leadership positions (Eastell, 2022; Alick, 2021; Walmsley et al., 2022). In a series of interviews with sector leaders in the immediate wake of the pandemic, Ciara Eastell (2022) points to new forms of shared leadership, stronger professional networks, greater emphasis on supporting mental health in the workforce, and investment in new leadership skills and capabilities, especially around digital and horizon-scanning. She also identifies a shift towards more authentic and emotionally-engaged leadership styles, characterised by ethical behaviour with open and transparent sharing of information.

The cultural sector is undergoing a period of unprecedented change. Many cultural leaders have tried to understand what they have heard about what has changed during the pandemic, and what needs to change, and to be ambitious in their response. The ability to respond, however, has been tempered by the pressing need to survive as organisations, which is still current for many. The Centre for Cultural Value's *Culture in Crisis* report (Walmsley et al., 2022) highlights a perfect storm whereby the levels of external challenge coincide with structural weaknesses around a lack skills, capacity and diversity in the workforce.[8] Widely-used leadership-of-change theories, such as the Eight Step Model (Kotter, 1996) and the Change Formula (Kannemiller & Jacobs, 1992) suggest that for change to happen there needs to be not only a clear vision and pressure to change, but also capacity, including skills and resources. At policy and organisational level, there is commitment to huge change in terms of the quality, nature, reach and scale of engagement, innovation around technology, response to the climate emergency, and the ongoing need to create a more inclusive and representative workforce to deliver on these challenges (Arts Council England, 2020). However, historically the sector has lacked developmental capital (Bolton et al., 2010), and many organisations have further depleted their financial and human capital in the past three years (Mohan, 2022). The growing focus on structural inequalities in wider society, including the workplace, and the increasing pressure on those in leadership roles as a result of the challenging and volatile operating context, has brought the limitations of heroic leadership models into sharper focus for many in the wider non-profit sector.

Recruitment packs for a number of leadership roles demonstrate that organisations are increasingly recognising that leadership roles and structures need to change in light of the challenges facing the sector, and that these more flexible models may enable a wider range of applicants (Live Art Development Agency, 2021; East London Dance, 2021; Royal Shakespeare Company, 2021). In its 2021 report of its field inquiry into the urgent needs and priorities of the theatre sector in the US, the Sundance Institute highlights an increased interest in collective leadership forms and plurality of leadership roles linked to a rejection of exclusionary norms (Alick, 2021).[9] Collective leadership is

also identified by Eastell (2022) as a trend emerging in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey of emerging co-leadership models in US non-profits positions this trend as consciously rejecting hierarchical leadership approaches in favour of "new ways to share power and center proximate Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) leaders" (Chary 2022). The three case studies Chary presents clearly link the move towards a structure where power is shared at the senior level to a wider shift in leadership approach towards what might be described as distributed, collaborative or plural leadership.[10] Rising Arts Agency (2021) make a similar case for co-leadership in their published account of their leadership transition.

Conclusion

Leadership of cultural organisations in the 2020s is complex and uncharted work that requires leaders who are comfortable with uncertainty; who can facilitate inclusion of a wide range of perspectives to develop new solutions and approaches for how we resource organisations and engage audiences; and who are highly emotionally intelligent, well-networked, and able to lead change and share responsibility and power within and across organisations. There is a growing recognition that the heroic leadership model no longer serves organisations or individual leaders well, as evidenced by growing interest in alternative models, reports of burnout and difficulty attracting and retaining senior executives. This picture is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. The leadership context for UK cultural organisations in the 2020s

Challenge facing cultural organisations	**Leadership implications: structures, styles and skills/ competencies**
Unprecedented levels of change and uncertainty	A shift from heroic to collaborative and authentic styles of leadership
Fragile/ failing business models and need to balance complex business needs	Leader as enabler of innovation Less hierarchical leadership structures
Need to increase reach and relevance	Relationship-building skills to enable broad networks and equitable partnerships Greater diversity in the senior workforce in terms of ethnicity, gender and disability
Need to increase workforce diversity, especially at a senior-leadership level	Greater diversity in the senior workforce in terms of ethnicity, gender and disability Ability to embrace complex diversity in the workforce Leader as developer of others
Increased capacity around digital, creative development and commercial models	Leader as enabler of innovation Less hierarchical leadership structures
Growing complexity of stakeholder relations and demands for accountability, ethical leadership and transparency	Inter-organisational leadership and stronger professional networks Values-driven and ethical leadership Authentic leadership: including the ability to be accountable, build trust and work ethically
Increased power-sharing and broadening involvement in decision-making	A shift from heroic to collaborative or collective styles of leadership Plural leadership structures

1.2 What contributes to the lack of diversity in executive roles?

There are many different factors that contribute to the lack of diversity in executive roles in the cultural sector. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive account of all these; however, to assess the potential of co-leadership as a more inclusive option, and to highlight its limitations and the wider efforts that will be needed to improve diversity, it is useful to highlight some of the key barriers.

In articulating the types of discrimination experienced, I've referred to the Four Levels of Racism model developed by Race Forward, a US-based organisation that brings systemic analysis to complex race issues to help people take effective action to address racial equity (Race Forward, 2023). This model applies to racial discrimination but it can be usefully applied to discrimination based on gender and disability. *Internalised discrimination* comprises our individual beliefs as influenced by our culture. This can include prejudice towards those perceived as 'other', internalised privilege (e.g. notions of superiority) and internalised oppression (negative or self-limiting beliefs about oneself). *Interpersonal discrimination* can be conscious or unconscious and occurs between individuals when our behaviour is affected by our personal beliefs. *Institutional discrimination* occurs within institutions and systems of power such as workplaces, or the education system. Unfair policies and practices routinely produce inequitable outcomes, for example, in the cultural sector a senior leadership which does not reflect the diversity of British society. Finally, *structural racism*, ableism or sexism includes the compound impact of societal factors including history and culture and leads to a systemic privileging of White people, men over women and the non-disabled over those with disabilities. Within these four types of discrimination, this research identifies ten key factors that contribute to a lack of leadership diversity and these are outlined below.

1.2.1 Labour market structure: the freelance factor

Structural issues in labour markets contribute to diversity problems. In the cultural sector, high levels of freelance, unpaid and informally-recruited project roles contribute to inequalities from entry-level onwards (Wreyford et al., pp.38-39). Freelance careers can be precarious: during the COVID-19 pandemic the proportion of freelancers in the workforce fell from 62% to 52% (Walmsley et al., 2021). There appears to be an over-representation of disabled people and women in the freelance cultural workforce. In the absence of sector-wide studies of the freelance workforce, a survey of the museums, heritage and libraries sector highlights several potential issues (Museum Freelance, 2020). Firstly, there is a major gender imbalance, with 83% of respondents being female, and an over-representation of parenting-age respondents compared with the employed workforce. This is explained by the flexibility offered by freelancing and the tendency for women to assume caring responsibilities which make full-time employed roles difficult, with 50% of respondents choosing to work part-time.[11] Among the top four motivations for selecting freelancing were: "work/life balance" (42%) and "to fit around childcare and caring" (36%). Wider workforce data shows women leave the employed cultural workforce around their late 20s and early 30s at the time when some would be starting a family (Brook et al. 2020) suggesting that the lack of flexibility in employed roles leads many to opt for freelance roles.

Whilst freelancing can be a positive choice for individuals, it can also be a disadvantage in terms of leadership progression, as this interview with a former executive search consultant suggests:

> Freelancers find it harder to demonstrate the institutional experience on a person specification like managing budgets or line-management. And they are less likely to be suggested to executive search consultants in the first place, as they have less profile. Often an executive search consultant will call up the peers of the vacant role and ask for suggestions of who they think is interesting or doing a good job – and those people are much more likely to suggest other gallery directors, for example, than freelancers. And very

> practically, as an executive search consultant if you are looking to fill a gallery director job you're searching LinkedIn for people with that on their CV, you're not searching freelancers and so their names are unlikely to come up.

A number of survey respondents cited employers under-valuing experience gained in a freelance capacity as a key barrier to progression into leadership roles.

1.2.2 Access to leadership development opportunities

Those in freelance employment are less likely to access leadership development opportunities than their employed counterparts (Kings College London, 2018). This is significant, as we know that women and disabled people are more likely to be freelance (Museum Freelance, 2020). Of the survey respondents, 70% said they found it either "difficult" or "very difficult" to access development opportunities to realise their career ambitions. The main barriers cited were: an expectation that development happens outside working hours; the cost (for self-employed people); lack of relevant content for those with disabilities; and the residential nature of many leadership courses which was problematic for those with caring responsibilities.

1.2.3 Employment practice: poor employment conditions and low levels of flexible working

Commentators and survey respondents highlight a number of issues around employment practice in the cultural sector, including: poor understanding of legal provision around inclusion, equality and diversity; poor working conditions (long hours, low pay, insecure contracts); lack of development opportunities; and inflexible and unrealistic roles. Several recent reports into diversity in the creative and cultural sector have highlighted the need to improve employment practice as a priority (Cameron, 2021; Wreyford et al., 2021).[12] Particular areas of improvement identified include offering greater flexibility, job-sharing, working from home and part-time working (Wreyford et al., 2021).

Whilst these factors impact many employees negatively, the impact on minoritised employees can be disproportionate. For example, in their research with Black and disabled individuals, for the Homecoming Project, Armstrong Cameron cite one interviewee whose experience of the lack of basic, legally required, support reveals the emotional and practical impact that poor employment practice can have on individuals.[13] When a disability makes some tasks harder to complete, the impact of unrealistic job descriptions is particularly dis-abling as another interviewee explains:

> I spent the majority of my working life struggling and working extra hard. Doing things three or four times or staying over at work. Staying at work later because it took me longer to figure something out because obviously, at that time, I didn't know that I had a learning disability. (Armstrong Cameron, 2022, p.14)

The long-hours culture whereby people are regularly expected to work far in excess of their contracted hours is particularly problematic for those with caring responsibilities or those who need to work shorter hours for health reasons (Brook et al., 2020). Most (75%) survey respondents agreed with the statement that "everyone works beyond their contracted hours in the cultural sector". As Cat Sheridan and Jo Verrent (2022) have recently claimed, "the cultural sector's engrained overwork mentality is fundamentally ableist". As this comment from a survey respondent highlights, there is a double disadvantage in that few senior part-time roles exist and endemic expectations of overworking mean even part-time roles require full-time hours:

> There are very few senior positions that are available part-time or as a job-share, and that would be realistically manageable (or the expectations at least) with my personal responsibilities. Even if part-time roles were available or job-shares I believe the role would be equivalent to more than a full-time role.

The lack of flexibility is the other key barrier for many potential candidates. The survey, and other research (Brook et al., 2020), suggests awareness of this limitation impacts people from an early stage of their career, leading to people de-selecting themselves; in other words never applying for senior roles in the first place. 52% of survey respondents felt that having caring responsibilities, including childcare, would stop them considering more senior roles. Others cited needing to adapt work around disabilities as the key barrier:

> I feel I could take on a senior role but I'm not sure the industry would be willing for me to do it in a way that works for me.
>
> I am confident I could take on a senior role in the future but I rarely see roles I am interested in, mostly because institutions tend to be very hierarchical and these roles rarely seem to have the support built-in that I would need as … someone who suffers with chronic illness/ mental health issues.

1.2.4 Recruitment practice: unrealistic job descriptions and lack of support for flexible working

Wider research into inclusion and diversity highlights recruitment as a particular area of concern where unconscious bias can compound outdated processes (McGregor-Smith, 2017, p.6). One of the key recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group review of diversity in the creative industries was a complete overhaul of recruitment practice:

> Competence-based approaches to jobs and commissions must become the norm across the sector, replacing informal recruitment practices. The effective practice examples we heard at the roundtable sessions, along with reviews of the 'What Works' evidence on hiring, suggests practices including formal recruitment; removing organisational branding; performance or work- based assessment of candidates; and clear criteria for hiring decisions are all crucial. Informal networks, hidden decision-making processes and 'gut reactions' still dominate parts of the creative economy, and underpin barriers and discrimination. (Wreyford et al., p.20)

One area of particular concern that emerged through the workforce survey and wider interviews was that expectations of senior executive roles are widely perceived to be unrealistic by experienced recruiters, potential candidates and some trustees themselves. One recruiter memorably referred to leadership job descriptions being "everything but the kitchen sink" and one leader interviewed described their own as a "fantasy wish list rather than a realistic person specification". Survey respondents echoed this view, with 76% disagreeing with the statement that the workload for senior roles seems "manageable". Studies have found women are significantly less likely to apply for roles than male counterparts if they do not possess all the requirements listed in the person specification (Mohr, 2014). And people who are Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse, and women, are more likely to experience Imposter Syndrome (see below) which can impact the likelihood of applying for a demanding role. Therefore, this over-loading of job descriptions disadvantages Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse leaders, and women, more than their White male peers.

There was also a strong perception among survey respondents that employers prefer leaders to work full-time and not flexibly (83%). A number of respondents doubted that employers would be receptive to an honest and constructive conversation about flexible working for either caring or disability reasons. One gave a recent example of having been rejected from a senior leadership role for which they were qualified and had been 'head-hunted' because the AD was not open to them working from home. An executive recruitment consultant shared how candidates with disabilities and caring responsibilities, who wished to request flexible working, often felt hesitant about whether this would disadvantage their application and would often decide not to pursue an application rather than engage in discussion where they doubted trustees would be genuinely open to flexible working. One interviewee shared that they had not informed their employer about their

disability during recruitment for fear that they would not be considered a suitable candidate. Another survey respondent shared how they feared employers would be unsupportive:

> I choose to keep my neurodivergence confidential, due to negative prejudices about my condition. When considering leadership roles I feel torn about disclosing and requesting the accommodations I need which holds me back from applying for leadership positions.

1.2.5 Exclusionary leadership norms

One of the biggest challenges to diversity in the leadership of the cultural sector is the out-dated and heroic notion of leadership, and associated norms. These include deeply unrealistic role descriptions for senior executives and patterns of chronic over-working.

These norms stem from beliefs such as:

- everyone in the cultural sector works excessive hours
- leaders need to work full-time
- leadership involves making personal sacrifice
- there is inherent conflict between artistic innovation and audience reach
- leaders need to have all the answers
- there has to be one person with whom the buck stops
- running a cultural organisation is different to running another type of organisation (and so only people who have run cultural organisations can know how to run them).

This list of beliefs was generated from the sector-specialist interviews and tested and augmented via feedback from arts professionals on Twitter before being used to generate a set of perception statements in the surveys. Among the early and mid-career professionals who responded to the survey there is evidence that some of these beliefs are being challenged, particularly the belief that leadership has to involve personal sacrifice. However survey respondents felt that many of these beliefs were still underpinning the leadership norms they observed.

These beliefs, norms and practices are harmful to many (Kings College London, 2018; Walmsley et al., 2022), but given their colonial, ableist and patriarchal overtones (Robinson, 2020; Wreyford, 2021; Rising Arts Agency, 2021) they impact women (Mohr, 2014), Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people and disabled people most keenly (Verrent & Sheridan, 2022). There has also been a tendency in the UK to rely heavily on individual organisational leaders rather than see leadership more holistically (Fanshawe, 2021). This has, until recently, been reflected in leadership development programmes and can also often be seen in boards' unrealistic expectations (Robinson, 2020). Survey respondents were highly critical of the leadership norms which they felt limit progression opportunities for many:

> Senior leadership recruitment has increasingly unrealistic high expectations of individuals, whilst there is much discussion of 'talent shortages', yet the two issues are interrelated.
>
> I think the expectation to sacrifice personal lives in the arts sector remains a huge issue and has a particular effect on women, parents/carers.
>
> I am a carer… I am an excellent arts professional and would be an excellent leader but the expectation that you work far beyond the hours you are paid for is a significant barrier for me.

> There is a normalisation of toxic work patterns in the arts, which is often to the detriment of individual and collective wellbeing. This needs to change for many reasons, and attracting talented and skilled workers is one of them.

1.2.6 The burden of being 'The Only One'

As Gould (2022) has highlighted, there is not only an issue with recruitment into senior roles in the arts, there is also an issue with retention.[14] Drawing on her own experience as the only Black person in a senior leadership role whilst at British Film Institute, Gould has described the challenges faced by those minoritised in the workplace as "the Only One" burden (Gould, 2020). This additional unpaid, unacknowledged, workload includes "representation, sector education and cultural translation" piled on top of already busy roles and negatively impacts individual wellbeing and capacity. This burden includes cultural taxation: a term used to describe the additional unpaid labour expected of minoritised individuals by their employers (Padilla, 1994). Gould argues that the already considerable pressures on those in leadership positions are intensified for those who exist as a minority in a workplace:

> The idea that we have to be three times as good means we can push ourselves three times as hard while carrying a workload three times as heavy (what with the additional educating, translating, code switching, environment transforming or simply trying to find common connection with colleagues whose lives are divergent to our own). No wonder this leads to higher burnout rates and job turnovers. (Gould, 2022)

The Homecoming Project report explores stories of Black and Neurodivergent experiences of the workplace. Interviewees described the high cost of operating in an environment lacking in psychological safety as "they were not necessarily valued for their talents and experience" (Armstrong Cameron, 2022, p.9). Similar themes emerged in the survey:

> Cultural sector leaders often do work outside work hours and sacrifice work-life balance and this makes leadership roles unattractive or unobtainable to marginalised communities who are already working twice as hard to have a similar output [to] their non-marginalised peers.

> It's hard to take on a senior role as a woman of colour and have a sustainable and manageable workload. Please note – a lot of POC are doing strategic level thinking and managing of queries, comments and micro/macro level aggressions… Institutions are not equipped at the moment to nurture this talent in the right way, which is very often dismissed or seen as trouble-making.

No wonder then, given the 'surcharge' for those who would be the Only One in an organisation – or even an entire sector – that individuals might be reluctant to apply for leadership positions that potentially come at such a high personal cost.

1.2.7 Lack of role models

Just as role models can encourage early and mid-career professionals, the inverse is true: when you don't see people like you in the position to which you aspire, this can have a negative impact. Survey responses reveal that some professionals wonder whether they can, or want to, progress into leadership roles:

> I feel like I'm at a vital point in my career where I can choose to value family, my own arts practice or I can really push for career development and leadership. All my role models have made huge sacrifices. I don't see a pathway that doesn't take a huge psychological toll.

> I would like to think in future it will be more equitable but I speak with more senior POC staff who say progress has been slow and they have been unable to progress.

Already, early in their careers, many people are not seeing themselves as potential future leaders. Initiatives which aim to target early-career ethnically-minoritised people, those with a working-class background and people with a disability, have learned not to market the opportunity as 'leadership development' if they wish to attract more inclusive cohorts (Kings College London, 2018, p.36).

Psychological safety in the workplace – the ability to bring your full self to work and speak openly without fear of judgment – is widely acknowledged to be a critical factor in high performance (Duhrigg, 2016). And yet, for those minoritised in the workplace, it feels hard to be open and authentic at work when we can't see others like us succeeding, as this interviewee in the Homecoming Project illustrates:

> I wasn't around anyone who ever had disclosed [being neuro-diverse]. I didn't know anyone who had come from where I came from in terms of my social economical background that was successful who had a disability or a difference. So, I didn't really see any representation that allowed me to know it was safe, and that you could still progress even if you had a something different about you. (Armstrong Cameron, 2022, p.14)

Interviewing people responsible for leadership programmes, I heard stories of early-career Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse leaders leaving the cultural sector to take on leadership roles in the wider non-profit or public sectors. The lack of female role models with children in leadership roles has been found to influence women's career decisions from an early age, in contrast with their male counterparts for whom the impact of parenting becomes a consideration only after starting a family (Brook, 2020).[15] There is evidence to suggest that many women decide early in their careers that leadership roles, and particularly artistic leadership roles, are not for us. This research rings true with my own experience. By age 25 I knew I wanted to run an art gallery, and at some point in my life that I also wanted to be a mother. After completing a PhD in History of Art I had progressed quickly in my career as a curator and had moved into my first management role at the regional arts board in London, where I worked closely with the leading art galleries in England, none of whom were led by women with children. As an aspiring gallery director in the 2000s my only female role models were childless and I'd also seen at close hand a former colleague struggle to balance motherhood with the long hours and frequent travel associated with curatorial networking and research. It felt impossible to combine my original career choice with a family life, and I gravitated into policy and management roles instead.

1.2.8 Imposter Syndrome

Various studies have shown how the cumulative impact of being discriminated against and othered can lead to the feelings of self-doubt termed 'imposter syndrome'. Not surprisingly, the incidence of imposter syndrome is reported to be higher among women, and particularly Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse women (Ahmed et al., 2020; Fanshawe, 2021).

Several the female interviewees, including a number of Black Asian and Ethically Diverse women, described how they would never have applied for a solo leadership role. Others specifically named 'imposter syndrome' as an issue that led them to favour co-leadership. One executive recruiter I interviewed highlighted lack of confidence, in the context of very demanding role descriptions, as deterring many potential candidates from applying:

> Candidates would sometime lack confidence in themselves, fearing the role would carry too much expectation or that it would not be as flexible as they needed it to be. It's very common for people to lack confidence, to feel they have to be a 100% match for the person specification before they can apply – especially women.

1.2.9 Discrimination around recruitment and progression opportunities

There is plenty of evidence of racism, ableism and sexism in wider British workplaces and no reason to expect this doesn't equally apply to the cultural sector. The McGregor-Smith Review *Race in the Workplace* concludes there is discrimination and bias at every stage of an individual's career:

> BME people are faced with a distinct lack of role models, they are more likely to perceive the workplace as hostile, they are less likely to apply for and be given promotions and they are more likely to be disciplined or judged harshly… All BME groups are more likely to be overqualified than White ethnic groups but White employees are more likely to be promoted than all other groups. (McGregor-Smith, 2017, pp.2-3)

Individual accounts of ethnically-minoritised and disabled individuals being over-looked for promotion and development opportunities are cited by Kings College London (2018) and Armstrong Cameron (2022). Two of the successful leadership candidates I interviewed spontaneously reported experiencing sexist remarks during their recruitment process, despite experience of discrimination not being an interview topic. Survey respondents also report inter-personal discrimination as a key barrier in their own leadership progression:

> I am confident I have the skills to do the job, however I have been purposefully kept at my level as there is no progression for people of colour. I have been kept at the same level for 10 years, I get seconded for an impossibly short time to deliver high profile projects but then I'm put back on entry-level money. It's appalling and I will be leaving the sector – it's been made clear I do not belong.

Wider studies of gender discrepancies in the senior workforce have demonstrated how traditional leadership competencies are typically associated with masculine traits and how this disadvantages female candidates who, in a lose-lose situation, are perceived to either lack these highly-gender-specific leadership competencies or, if female candidates behave in a stereotypically-masculine way, are judged more harshly than their male peers (Belasen et al., 2021). Studies of gender imbalances in higher education suggest that the impact of this inter-personal discrimination, in terms of the missing women in senior leadership, is compounded by women leaders making a conscious decision not to apply for roles that appear deeply unattractive (Watton et al., 2019).[16]

1.2.10 The myth of meritocracy

Perhaps one of the most pernicious and pervasive aspects of ableism, racism and sexism in the cultural sector is the belief that discrimination does not exist. Despite clear evidence to the contrary, the authors of *Culture is Bad for You* found that many in the sector, and particularly those in the most influential positions, believe it is a meritocracy – that anyone can succeed regardless of class, gender, ethnicity or disability (Brooks et al., 2020).[17] In her survey of staff working on Creative People and Places programmes, Cameron found whilst many acknowledged the structural and systemic inequalities in the sector, significantly fewer accepted that there was bias, or what we might term inter- and intra- personal discrimination. In stark contrast, 95% of survey respondents disagreed with the statement that the cultural sector is a meritocracy.

Summary

There are multiple barriers to progression into executive positions in the cultural sector that contribute to the lack of diversity in senior roles, and it is also important to acknowledge how these factors compound one another in how they impact individuals. These issues are summarised in Table 2 below, and in the following section of the report I identify where the benefits of co-leadership are helpful in addressing some of these challenges. It would be unrealistic to suggest that co-leadership offers a solution to all ten barriers articulated in this section, however given the tendency for many in the sector to down-play the impact of discrimination, as is highlighted by the final point about the myth of meritocracy, it also feels useful to summarise some of the broader issues that will need to be addressed in the sector in order to be able to access and embrace the full diversity of talent.

The research has highlighted some challenges that impact diversity of leadership but which cannot be addressed by a change in leadership model alone. These are ultimately the responsibility of the boards of cultural organisations. The endemic culture of over-working, which is present at all levels of the workforce, but often expected most of senior roles, has a high cost for many but particularly discriminates against those with disabilities, caring responsibilities or those who are subject to cultural taxation, as a result of systemic racism. Boards and leaders have a choice as to whether they continues to accept this 'norm', or begin to set priorities for cultural organisations in better alignment with their resources. I hope that if we recognise that this practice is discriminatory that might encourage those responsible to review this approach.

Table 2: Factors contributing to lack of diversity at leadership level in the cultural sector

Institutional and structural issues	a. Labour market structure: the freelance factor b. Access to leadership development opportunities c. Employment practice: endemic over-working, lack of structured progression and low levels of flexible working d. Recruitment practice: unrealistic job descriptions and poor recruitment practice e. Exclusionary leadership norms which are racialised, ableist and gendered f. The burden of being the 'Only One'
Internalised and inter-personal issues	g. Lack of role models h. Imposter Syndrome i. Discrimination around recruitment and progression opportunities j. The myth of meritocracy: a tendency to under-estimate the role of inter-personal discrimination in the sector

Section 2. The case for co-leadership

This section considers the benefits of co-leadership, drawing on academic research supplemented with my interviews with current co-leaders and their boards, highlighting how co-leadership is well-placed to respond to both the operational challenges facing the sector, and the specific challenges around increasing leadership diversity.

2.1 Benefits of co-leadership

Studies of co-leadership across business, higher education, healthcare and cultural sectors highlight the integrative benefits of 'constellation leadership': a form of collective leadership in which members play roles which are specialised, differentiated and complementary in a 'shared role' space (Hodgson 1965, cited in Denis et al., 2012). Co-leadership is described as suiting organisations which are highly professionalised and characterised by having competing or plural logics, i.e. different business drivers such as, in the case of cultural organisations, audience reach, income generation, and artistic innovation (Reid & Fjallvær, 2023). Co-leadership has also enabled cultural organisations to continue to involve of practising artists in organisational leadership, despite growing complexity and the subsequent need to manage risk and balance artistic excellence with organisational wellbeing (Reid and Fjallvær, 2023).[18] Other commentators highlight the increase in breadth of competencies and diversity of leadership styles that co-leadership offers, as well as improved stability during leadership transitions (Feigen et al., 2022). A recent study of companies with co-CEOs (Feigen et al., 2022) found improved financial performance over a four-year period, compared with peer companies led by single CEOs.

As co-leadership involves collaboration, its benefits include those associated with collaborative leadership more widely, including the ability to generate new solutions and additional resources to address complex problems; building employee engagement and discretionary effort; and productivity gains from efficiency (Archer & Cameron, 2013). There is also cross-over with the benefits of high performing teams, as outlined in team development theory (Tuckman, 1965) and Team Roles Theory (Belbin, 2010). In effect co-leadership dyads or triads, leadership groups of two or three, are mini leadership teams. Belbin contrasts heroic or solo leadership with team leadership, suggesting the former suits a crisis where swift decisions need to be pushed through, whereas team leadership suits situations where complexity poses greater issues than urgency and no one person can comprehend everything or provide the direction required for all situations encountered (Belbin, 2010). A similar distinction is made by Feigen et al. (2022) when contrasting the situations where co-CEOs offer an advantage over single CEOs. Where co-leadership increases diversity, we also observe what has been described as the 'diversity dividend'; including improved performance, productivity, greater innovation and richer solutions to complex problems (Fanshawe, 2021). Wider studies of executive-level job sharing demonstrate benefits around improved leader wellbeing, enabling career progression and facilitating flexible working, which in turn enables a more diverse workforce (Job Share Project).

Table 3 summarises the key benefits identified by interviewees for each of the case study organisations. Interviewees were asked to describe in their own words what they perceived to be the benefits of co-leadership to them and their organisations. Interviews were recorded and transcripts were analysed, with responses categorised according to the eight main benefits of co-leadership identified in the wider research. Analysis of the interview transcripts of the 11 case study organisations reveals eight key benefits achieved through co-leadership that are consistently reported. Co-leadership is seen to:

1. Enable change and innovation through encouraging a wider collaborative culture, including by symbolising pluralism in the structure
2. Encourage integration of competing logics

3. Widen the talent pool by enabling flexible working, making roles more attractive to first-time CEOs and increasing the number of roles available at senior level
4. Increase the range of skills/expertise at senior level
5. Enhance organisational resilience
6. Provide pastoral support and build confidence for co-leaders
7. Provide developmental benefits for co-leaders
8. Deliver value for money/ improved productivity

Table 3: Summary of benefits of co-leadership for each case study organisation

Organisation name	**Key benefits**
East London Dance	Enables change and innovation; widens talent pool; increases range of skills/expertise at senior level; developmental for co-leaders; value for money; offers pastoral support for co-leaders
Clean Break Theatre Company	Encourages integration of competing logics; enhances organisational resilience; provides pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders; symbolises commitment to pluralism
Birmingham Museums Trust	Wider talent pool; enables change and innovation; increases range of skills/expertise at senior level; encourages wider collaborative culture; offers pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders; developmental for co-leaders; value for money
Royal Museum Cornwall	Enabling rapid change; integration of competing logics; encourages wider collaborative culture; enhances organisational resilience; provides pastoral support for co-leaders
Fun Palaces	Widens talent pool; enhances organisational resilience; provides pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders; developmental for co-leaders; symbolises commitment to pluralism
Diverse City	Widens talent pool; enhances organisational resilience; provides pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders
Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum	Widens talent pool; increases range of skills/expertise at senior level; enhances organisational resilience; provides pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders; developmental for co-leaders; quality assurance; value for money
Schools Group	Widens talent pool; increases range of skills/expertise at senior level; enhances organisational resilience; developmental for co-leaders; value for money
Creative Black Country	Increases range of skills/expertise at senior level; encourages wider collaborative culture; enhances organisational resilience and capacity for external relations
Royal Shakespeare Company	Enables change and innovation; encourages integration of competing logics; widens talent pool; provides pastoral support for co-leaders; developmental for co-leaders; symbolises commitment to pluralism
Rising Arts Agency	Widens talent pool; increases range of skills/expertise at senior level; encourages wider collaborative culture; enhances organisational resilience; provides pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders; developmental for co-leaders; symbolises commitment to young leaders

Below each of these benefits is outlined with reference to specific examples from the case studies and the operating context described in section 1.

2.1.1 Enables change and innovation through encouraging a wider collaborative culture, including by symbolising pluralism in the structure

For organisations seeking to encourage a collaborative culture, having two leaders can be symbolic; having two leaders is a visible commitment to pluralism, and the valuing of multiple perspectives and experiences. Royal Museum Cornwall (RCM) is keen to encourage greater collaboration across its small staff team to make full use of its resources and improve performance. Jonathan Morton explains how co-leadership aligns with the culture he and Bryony Robbins seek to create:

> We really encourage people to think outside their roles. In museums people can get siloed, too specialist in their areas that they just sit over there and don't see how they can contribute to the success of everything the organisation does. We don't want to do it like that, we want to work collectively, to develop new ways of working and ensure everyone can contribute to our success fully.

Co-leadership has enabled RCM to transform its ways of working rapidly, as Bryony Robbins reflects:

> This organisation has changed radically in the time we've been here. And that would have been a lot harder if there was only one person in post. But because there's two of us there is more momentum. And there's more persuasion. There's more opportunity for collaborating with different people. I think it has really pushed things along at a pace.

The Chair of BMT highlights how co-leadership is particularly suited to a situation where new thinking and change is needed:

> The benefits are so obvious, but it comes back to having different people with different experiences and skills, all of which are really valuable in leading and shaping an organisation. Given where we are at the moment, which is about reimagining what the Birmingham Museums service could be and what the future model would look like, the combined skills and horsepower of two people is clearly advantageous.

Given the unprecedented pace, scale and complexity of change in the cultural sector and the widely-held view that new cultural business models will need to be developed, the ability to lead change and, by involving others, discover new ways of working is critically important. As RSC Leadership Associate Justine Themen says, "real change is not about individual ambition". Enabling different solutions to emerge through greater diversity of thought is absolutely central to the co-leadership model. Makala Cheung draws a parallel with her experience of parenting, describing how her style and that of her husband were very different but how this worked well when raising their daughter. Rather than seeing their differences as something to fear, Makala recognised the potential for collaboration:

> I think some people try and go sometimes for thinking you have to agree on everything. But actually, if you do, then you might as well just have one person and you're not going to get multiple perspectives and maybe find a new way of thinking or doing things.

2.1.2 Integration of competing logics

The desire to integrate artistic, commercial, social and civic agendas was the original driver for the creation of the AD/ED model in theatre and the visual arts (Antrobus 2011; Reid & Fjallvær, 2023). This continues to be important as pressure from funders to increase reach escalates (Arts Council England, 2020) in the face of growing demands for accountability and ethical leadership (Eastell, 2022; Kings College London, 2018). Individuals with different specialisms and perspectives, typically

the artistic and organisational leads in a cultural organisation, share leadership responsibilities and together ensure that potentially competing drivers are held in balance, or even combined in new forms. For Clean Break Theatre, with a history rooted equally in theatre and social justice around women in prison, better integrating the social and artistic elements of its work was a core driver in creating a co-Artistic Director role. And despite their expertise and responsibilities falling broadly into a traditional organisational and artistic split, the RSC Leadership Associates have found benefit in a more integrative approach to responsibilities, describing a resulting richness of new ideas.

2.1.3 Widening the talent pool by enabling flexible working, making roles more attractive to first-time CEOs and increasing the number of roles available at senior level

Co-leadership enables flexible working: a key strategy for improving the participation of women with children in the workplace, and those with disabilities or chronic health conditions (Fanshawe, 2021). For several of the case studies, including Zak Mensah of BMT, both co-leaders of East London Dance (ELD), Kirsty Lothian at Fun Palaces and Jennifer Jones at Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum (ACBM), the ability to work part-time due to parenting responsibilities was critical. Flexibility around other caring responsibilities and a desire to work part-time was also a key factor in broadening the talent pool for other case studies, including Diverse City and the Schools Group example.

Out of the full range of flexible working options, job-sharing was the option that most survey respondents (94%) said they would want to consider when applying for a senior role but also the option fewest currently had (18%). Access to flexible working options including part-time, flexi-time (choice of working hours), compressed hours, time off in lieu and working from home were important for more than 70% of respondents to be able to consider senior roles in future. Wider studies exploring senior workforce diversity and gender have found that flexibility is critical (Daniels cited in Watton et al., 2019) and flexibility is cited as a key factor in enabling greater gender diversity in senior leadership roles in healthcare (Belasen et al., 2021).

Co-leadership also suits first-time CEOs, including those whose ability to gain traditional leadership experience has been impacted by structural and interpersonal discrimination. Nine in ten survey respondents felt that co-leadership could make leadership more attractive to more people and 88% agreed co-leadership could attract a more diverse talent pool for leadership roles. Co-leadership is also perceived as less intimidating, as it creates an in-built support option. Euella Jackson and Jess Bunyan from Rising Arts Agency were adamant that, at this stage of their career, they would only consider co-leading, as was Sara Wajid at BMT. A significant number (46%) of respondents felt that they were more likely to be appointed in a co-leadership model, than as a sole leader.

Finally, and very simply, by doubling the number of roles, co-leadership creates more opportunities for diversifying executive roles. These can otherwise often be limited by the situation of ‘dead man’s shoes’, with low levels of turnover in senior roles.

2.1.4 Increasing the range of skills and expertise at a senior level

As leadership challenges have increased in the cultural sector, the range of experience and skills expected of individuals has become unrealistic, leading one executive search consultant to liken it to a search for unicorns. Broadening the range of skills and experience was the initial driver that led Creative Black Country (CBC) to split its Director role into two posts, as it became apparent during recruitment that it was unrealistic to find the full breadth of the requirements in a single person. The Chairs of ELD and BMT both described the breadth of expertise, skills and networks of their joint applications as a winning combination, far out-stripping what a single candidate could provide.

Several case studies also noted the benefit of having two different personalities or individuals in forming effective external relationships, another area of growth for cultural CEOs. If one leader

didn't 'click' with an external stakeholder, the other might, increasing the collective ability to build networks. Also where senior leadership capacity is increased overall by co-leadership the capacity for relationship-building is valued, for example by CBC whose geographical remit and community-focused ways of working necessitate high levels of partnership-working.

2.1.5 Enhancing organisational resilience

Historically, co-leadership has enabled cultural organisations to retain artistic leadership whilst balancing this with organisational and financial wellbeing, and trustees felt that having two leaders offered greater stability should one move on or become incapacitated (Antrobus, 2011). Given the concerns around leadership burnout; the impact of the COVID-19 on those with caring responsibilities and the clinically vulnerable; and the long-term mental and physical consequences of the pandemic for many, having a pair of leaders offers greater organisational resilience and may also improve leaders' wellbeing. Practically, flexible job-sharing enables Makala Cheung and Kirsty Lothian of Fun Palaces to flex around family and business needs, with Makala increasing her working days around school holidays and peaks in programming. For ACBM, Mark Macleod was able to temporarily increase his working hours to cover a period of maternity leave for his job-share partner Jennifer Jones.

2.1.6 Provision of pastoral support and building of confidence for co-leaders

Whilst some leaders prefer to work alone, many value the formal and informal support of having a co-leader, which is often light-heartedly referred to as a 'professional marriage' (Antrobus, 2011). Co-leadership, especially when it means a leader is not the 'Only One', can offer emotional support. Given that many co-leaders I interviewed had worked through the COVID-19 pandemic together, including in the Schools Group and RCM, many valued the emotional support co-leadership provided. As Anna Hermann from Clean Break explained:

> An absolute benefit was experiencing the pandemic with three women holding the reins. I can't imagine what that would have felt like otherwise with the speed at which we needed to make decisions. It made the weight of the responsibility feel more manageable and avoided the burnout I saw in other organisations with single CEOs who were completely exhausted. During that unparalleled, difficult, complex time, having that support was important.

In her study of the recent growth of co-leadership in US non-profits, Chary (2022) highlights that, for some, co-leadership feels a more inclusive and supportive model.[19] Working together at RSC has meant Justine Themen and Sandeep Mahal could support one another practically and emotionally during periods of illness or when very challenging situations arose. And several of the co-leaders including Sandeep Mahal, Makala Cheung and Sara Wajid spoke of either experiencing imposter syndrome or a lack of confidence around their leadership experience that was mitigated by working with a co-leader. For Kirsty Lothian of Fun Palaces, mutual support is "baked into" the model; her co-leader is her "buddy". Whilst Sajida Carr explains that the expectation associated with executive titles can feel onerous, whereas co-leadership feels less isolating:

> The title 'Director' is quite loaded. You're expected to know everything and sometimes I don't. If I'm in doubt then I'll check in with Parminder as a partner, and that's a good thing to have a second-pair of eyes on things as well, at times.

For Sara Wajid the experience of working alongside her co-leader has enabled her to develop the confidence that would enable her, should she wish, to take on a solo leadership role:

> It gives you a safe way to try it out. If you had those doubts, or you feel like leadership is for other types of people, it's an incredible scaffolding opportunity between the two of you. I'd say we have enough confidence between the two of us. Zak has got enough confidence on his own. But I can still borrow his confidence to learn and scaffold myself into that situation.

> And I think I could probably be a CEO now on my own, I'm not sure that I would want to do that, necessarily, but I can see that it's possible. And there would have been no way for me to change my consciousness other than going through this.

2.1.7 Developmental opportunity for co-leaders

Co-leading creates peer-learning opportunities, especially when co-leaders bring complementary skills and expertise, different working styles and lived experience. Jess Bunyan of Rising Arts Agency, whose own expertise is more organisational and commercial, cites having learned new engagement and facilitation skills from her co-leadership partner, Euella Jackson. For Zak Mensah and Sara Wajid at BMT, the learning has included observing one another's different working styles. Mark Macleod and Jennifer Jones explain that working alongside a peer has increased the rigour and quality of their thinking, providing opportunities for critical friend feedback, as well as enabling benchmarking. In studies of co-leadership in healthcare, opportunities for peer-learning were identified as a key benefit of the model (Belasen et al., 2021).

2.1.8 Value for money/ improved productivity

All three chairs of case study organisations who were interviewed cited value for money as a key benefit. Given that the additional cost of co-leadership is often cited as one of the main barriers to greater adoption of the model, this is a significant finding. Co-leadership can be cost-neutral when roles are shared 50:50, and the marginal costs of over-lapping job-shares ranged from 10-20% of the salary. Even when an organisation had appointed two full-time co-CEOs, the organisation made savings elsewhere in the structure (Rising Arts Agency, CBC). Wider research, recently published in Harvard Business Review, suggests an increased investment in leadership increases performance and profitability, as public companies which employed co-CEOs tended to produce better financial returns than peers with a single CEO (Feigen et al., 2022).[20]

In each of the three case studies where chairs reported value for money as a benefit, the CEO role included some overlap: two were constructed as 1.2 FTE roles, allowing one day 'overlap', and the third as 1.1FTE, allowing a half-day. ACBM has an even leaner model with 2 x 0.5FTE roles meaning there are no additional salary costs and the marginal increase in overheads (for example additional IT equipment) was offset in the UK context by reduced employer National Insurance (NI) contributions due to the part-time salaries falling below a particular NI threshold. At RCM where trustees were asked to convert a (male) CEO and (female) Deputy model to an equal co-leadership the additional cost of this change was a 17% increase in the deputy salary, which Jonathan Morton noted was in line with the national gender pay gap.

Co-leadership enabled these organisations to access a level of expertise and range of skills in one shared role than their budget allowed in one post. As one chair confessed, "I think we recognised we were unlikely with the money we could offer to get all we needed in one person." These three examples all involved job-sharing and whilst all the chairs interviewed were mindful that there was potential for exploitation if part-time leaders consistently worked excessive hours, in follow-up interviews the post-holders in one case study confirmed that they carefully tracked their working hours to avoid this and that certainly, pro-rata, they did not work more unpaid hours than their full-time counterparts.

Summary

The benefits of co-leadership in the case study organisations include the benefits of wider collaboration and increased workforce diversity, and have been replicated in wider studies of co-leadership. These benefits are an excellent fit for the challenges facing the UK cultural sector, including that co-leadership enables a broader range of experience, perspectives and skills in leadership roles; facilitates more integrative and innovative solutions to the complex challenges the sector is facing; attracts (and retains) a more diverse and therefore richer talent pool; improves performance; and offers value for money. There is a clear correlation between these benefits and the challenges currently facing cultural organisations, and this is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: The leadership context and benefits of co-leadership compared

Challenge facing cultural organisations	Benefits of co-leadership
Unprecedented levels of change and uncertainty	Enables change and innovation Provides pastoral support and builds confidence for co-leaders Enhances organisational resilience
Fragile/ failing business models and need to balance complex business needs	Encourages integration of competing logics Enables broader range of experience and expertise at executive level including managerial/commercial
Need to increase reach and relevance	Enables broader range of experience and expertise (and diversity of perspectives) at executive level
Need to increase workforce diversity, especially at a senior leadership level	Widens talent pool as it facilitates flexible working, which is particularly important for women and people with disabilities Developmental for co-leaders Suits first-time CEOs Symbolises commitment to pluralism and EDI
Need for increased capacity around digital, creative development and commercial models	Enables broader range of experience and expertise at executive level including commercial/ digital and artistic
Growing complexity of stakeholder relations and demands for accountability, ethical leadership and transparency	Dialogic space/ critical friends enable rigour and accountability Increases diversity at executive level
Increased power sharing and broadening involvement in decision-making	Encourages wider collaborative culture Widens talent pool; more inclusive and representative leadership Increases executive role numbers

Co-leadership also offers a number of benefits in relation to the numerous factors which contribute to continued inequalities around gender, disability and ethnicity and leadership progression in the cultural sector. Notably, it increases the number of leadership roles by doubling the number of roles available in a sector where turnover in senior roles can be very limited. Most significantly, in terms of disability and gender equality, co-leadership enables flexible working and job-sharing. Because co-

leadership is suitable for first-time CEOs and challenges exclusionary leadership norms it is more accessible to those who, due to structural discrimination, may have found it harder to access leadership development opportunities and may not see themselves – or be seen by others – as qualified for unrealistic heroic leadership roles. Co-leadership involves working closely with a peer, which creates a practically and emotionally-supportive and developmental environment for leaders. This in turn contributes to attracting and retaining a wider range of people. It is not, however, a panacea, and whilst co-leadership can contribute to increasing diversity at an executive level, far wider action is needed.

The correlation between these benefits and the factors contributing to inequalities in executive leadership are summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Factors contributing to lack of diversity compared with co-leadership benefits

Barrier	**Benefit of co-leadership**
a. Labour market structure: the freelance factor	a. No direct benefit
b. Access to leadership development opportunities	b. Facilitates peer-peer learning and development; suits first-time CEOs
c. Employment practice: endemic over-working, lack of structured progression and low levels of flexible working	c. Easily adapted to flexible-working including career-breaks (ACBM, ELD); supportive (RSC, Rising Arts Agency)
d. Recruitment practice: unrealistic job descriptions and lack of HR capacity	d. Breadth of competencies across two candidates (ACBM, BMT, ELD)
e. Exclusive leadership norms	e. Inclusive, anti-heroic, collective leadership ethos
f. The burden of being the 'Only One'	f. Supportive (BMT, RSC, Rising Arts Agency)
g. Lack of role models	g. Minoritised leaders now in co-leadership positions; increased number of executive leadership opportunities
h. Imposter Syndrome	h. Supportive (CBC, RSC, Rising Arts Agency)
i. Discrimination around recruitment and progression opportunities	i. No direct benefit
j. The myth of meritocracy	j. No direct benefit

This leads to the conclusion that co-leadership, well-managed, offers the cultural sector huge potential in terms of the key challenges it faces, and is an opportunity to develop a leadership model which is more inclusive and therefore more successful. The following section explores the evidence for how co-leadership can be well-managed, and the risks that need to be considered.

Section 3. Co-leadership in practice

This section sets out the conditions required for co-leadership to work well, outlining the implications for recruitment, support and development, and for wider working practices. It also considers what can go wrong with co-leadership, summarising the key risks and how they can be avoided. In this it draws on the experience both of those who have successfully managed co-leadership and those with negative experiences. A series of case studies supplements this section, providing 11 examples of current co-leadership models in a range of cultural organisations. A table summarising the organisational details of the case study organisations is provided in Appendix I. It is important to explore what enables co-leadership to work well, and what problems can arise, because any model needs not only to be a good fit for the context but also well executed. A corollary finding is that when co-leadership fails, this does not necessarily prove it is the model itself that is flawed. It is also possible, as we will see, that failure occurs due to poor execution of the model. It is therefore important that boards considering deploying co-leadership understand not only the conditions required for its success, but equally the common pitfalls and how they can be avoided.

3.1 What does effective co-leadership involve?

Given scepticism in mainstream leadership discourse that sharing power can work, resulting from the prevalence of heroic leadership norms, there is a strong emphasis in research on how co-leadership works in practice (Denis et al., 2012). The central themes across studies include complementarity of experience and differentiation of responsibilities. Complementarity ensures a business case for collaboration and enables synergy and innovation (Reid & Fjellvær, 2023). Differentiation and inter-dependence are seen as factors that mitigate conflict between leaders (Hodgson et al., 1965, cited in Denis et al., 2012). The avoidance of conflict, or rather the enabling of constructive conflict, is often mentioned (Reid & Fjellvær, 2023). Complementarity of temperament, and previous experience of working together (referred to as 'role rehearsal') are also highlighted as being important (Hodgson et al., 1965, cited in Denis et al., 2012). In their survey of the evidence in the wider field of plural leadership, within which co-leadership (or constellation leadership) is one form, Denis concludes:

> We also know such arrangements tend to require individuals to develop a form of complementarity, a modus vivendi that works for them, and that this may involve role specialization and differentiation as well as mutual trust and flexibility. We also have some ideas about when and where such arrangements might best fit the setting, with professionalized and pluralistic organisations being the case in point. At the same time, issues of accountability, legitimacy with stakeholders, and internal competition among co-leaders are potential weak points of this form that render them potentially fragile. (Denis, et al., 2012, p.240)

My earlier study of successful co-leadership pairings in UK theatre highlighted the specific shared values held by co-leaders that underpin their ways of working and the competencies required. Shared values included a commitment to collaboration; and an integrative view of cultural organisations, which values audiences and artists equally, and recognised the importance of organisational health. The competencies required to co-lead well were listed as ambition and commitment to learning; communication; emotional intelligence; and the ability to build a shared vision (Antrobus, 2011). In the wider literature of team and collaborative leadership, similar competencies and values are described as well as management approaches including shared responsibility for strategy, joint accountability and well-developed communication channels (Tuckman, 1965; Archer & Cameron, 2013).

Reid and Fjellvær's comprehensive study of co-leadership in the arts internationally (2023) focuses on the integrative nature that characterises this form of leadership. It also highlights the potential

for power imbalances to unsettle the equality at the heart of these relationships and the importance of constructive conflict. They conclude that successful co-leaders need an integrative approach to competing logics, i.e. they need to understand and respect one another's specialisms and perspectives; and roles need to be differentiated to avoid conflict and ensure efficiency. A careful balance needs to be struck as too much specialisation or overlap could cause potential conflict:

> To accomplish innovation and an overarching integration of logics, co-leaders need to be aware of and accept the ongoing tensions inherent in the pluralism of these organizations. Ideally these leaders would be confidently competent in their own professional domains and their interdependencies, and engage in a balancing approach. They would both contribute equally to organizational strategy… They adopt a repertoire of relationship and trust building practices including regular communication, and a capacity and willingness to negotiate solutions that integrate the organization's underlying common interests. When the shared leadership role space is focused in such a way, the stage is set for developmental innovation. (Reid & Fjellvær, 2023, p128).

The following section draws on this wider research into effective co-leadership and alongside analysis of transcripts of 20 interviews with executive leaders with experience of co-leadership, from the cultural and wider non-profit sector, undertaken for this research during Autumn 2022. The findings are summarised in the table below:

Table 6: Features of effective co-leadership relationships

Area	Details
Competencies	• Different and complementary professional skills, working styles and expertise • High level of emotional intelligence: including self-awareness, awareness of and ability to navigate power and embrace difference • Excellent communication skills including ability to co-create a shared vision, listen and build empathy, embrace complexity and uncertainty, encourage challenge and handle conflict constructively
Shared values	• Values difference, diversity and collaboration • Non-hierarchical within and beyond partnership • Integrative approach to organisational competing logics – i.e. understanding and respectful of one another's different perspectives and expertise • Operates with high levels of trust and flexibility
Ways of working	• Agreement on how to work together including disagreements • Frequent, honest and open communication • Shared physical space or equivalent • Flexibility to support one another when required
Structure/ role design	• Differentiation: shared responsibilities which play to the individual's strengths, avoiding unnecessary duplication • Shared responsibility for organisational strategy • Opportunities to learn from one another • Joint accountability – both report to Chair • Equality of workload, pay, contract terms

Taking each area in turn, this section outlines what these features look like in practice with reference to the case study organisations.

3.1.1 Competencies

Complementarity is critical: for Sara Wajid and Zak Mensah their different skills and perspectives are very important to how they conceive of co-leadership, providing a diversity of thought which enables collaborative working. As Zak puts it: “we can make better decisions together… two heads are literally better than one”. Sara explains:

> We come from quite different professional backgrounds. We are a decade apart in age and grew up in quite different places and circumstances so we have different social attitudes and takes on the world and together we bring a diverse view from the CEO. (Saxton Bampfylde, 2022)

Zak adds that their difference was part of the attraction: “we actually wanted to work together because we don't always think about all the things the same, because if we did, you wouldn't need two people”.

Disagreements are an inevitable consequence of any form of plural leadership. Collaboration must involve difference in order to be generative, just as it is the grit in the oyster that makes the pearl (Archer & Cameron, 2013). Reid and Fjellvær draw a helpful distinction between useful difference around ideas (‘subject conflict’) and unproductive conflict around status. Status conflict is about power and winning by asserting authority and is to be avoided (Reid & Fjellvær, 2023, p.85). Subject conflict can lead to the generation of fresh ideas from different perspectives. Reid and Fjellvær categorise co-leadership relationships into three types: collaborative, tolerant (‘negative peace’) and toxic. Tolerant relationships are transactional, responsibilities are divided and areas of shared responsibility are found through compromise or trading. Conflict is avoided, but the partnership fails to add value and risks being inefficient. Successful co-leaderships are collaborative, harnessing the diversity within the team of two to generate new solutions beyond the scope of one leader’s imagination. Mastery of subject conflict is therefore a key competency for any co-leader, and this includes knowing when difference is valuable, notably when situations involve cognitive and non-routine tasks (i.e. they are creative and complex, such as strategy development) rather than routine (Fanshawe, 2021).

However difference is not useful or necessary in all situations and can become inefficient. Therefore co-leaders also need to be able to ‘agree to disagree’ on less important matters. Jennifer Jones of ACBM and Zak Mensah of BMT both spoke of the necessity of not trying to agree on everything and trusting their co-leaders to take a different approach to that they would have chosen. Zak reminds himself to ask whether the issue in question is “the hill he is willing to die on”, i.e. how important is it? If it’s not critically important then he’s willing to concede. Another co-leader described the importance of being able to let go and move on once committed to the decision, so long as you feel listened to and trust your co-leader:

> If we've disagreed but I feel like I've been heard on the reason why and we still agreed to do the other thing then I'll commit to the other thing. And better to do it with full commitment than to still be thinking about the other option. I think that's a crucial skill – this ability to commit to a thing which at first didn't feel, or even still might not seem, completely right, but you agree that joint course and you fully enter into that.

3.1.2 Shared values

Co-leaders work closely together so need to develop strong relationships. Interviewees often frame this in terms of personal 'chemistry', but when probed further this appears to consist of having a similar set of values and a shared vision for the organisation.

It is these common values and vision that enable productive difference of perspectives, working styles, and expertise. Sajida Carr explains how differently she works to Parminder Dosanjh and whilst this could lead to some friction, this difference has been very helpful over time as they've each adapted to one another's different styles. Similarly whilst Sandeep Mahal prefers structure and clarity, Justine Themen describes working best in a more fluid way, and this difference in style means that together they bring the best out of one another. In contrast, one case study where co-leadership did not come so easily initially was at Clean Break, despite the co-ADs having chosen to work together and having done so for four years previously. Anna Herrmann attributes their commitment to making the model work, despite difficulties, to their shared vision and values. And in one of the anonymous case studies of difficult relationships, the co-leaders had applied for the role together, and had a track record of collaborating. However, on balance, the Chair believed that it emerged that their visions for the organisation were less closely aligned than they had realised.

The case studies suggest that co-leaders don't need to know one another, or to have worked together previously. In the case studies, several co-leaders had previously worked together, including at Clean Break, Rising Arts Agency, Diverse City and ELD. But the majority of co-leaders did not know one another before working together, including at RCM, CBC, Fun Palaces and the RSC, and the 'match-making' had been initiated by the trustees or recruitment panel. Even when joint applicants selected one another, most had not worked together before. The job-sharing co-leaders of ACBM were friends, but had never worked together; Sara Wajid and Zak Mensah had met only once before agreeing to apply for their co-CEO role. Their initial conversation about the proposition was quite simple, as Sara explains:

> In my mind it was almost simultaneous to think job share and to think Zak… It was very quick and straightforward. We had a one-hour conversation on the phone and then, by the end of that, we were both pretty clear.

The table below summarises how the relationship and model arose in each case study organisation. Given familiarity is often considered a factor in the success of co-leadership, it is significant to note the high proportion of successful co-leadership relationships in the case studies where leaders did not previously have a track record of working together.

Table 7: How co-leadership arrangements emerged

Organisation name	How did co-leadership arise?
East London Dance	Flexible and inclusive recruitment open to various models. Co-leaders had worked together previously and applied together.
Clean Break Theatre Company	Internal reorganisation. Co-leaders had worked together for four years before becoming co-ADs.
Birmingham Museums Trust	Proposed by candidates in response to external recruitment for solo CEO. Candidates had met once before deciding to apply together and had never worked together.
Royal Museum Cornwall	CEO recruitment led to two posts being recruited in CEO/ Deputy model which staff later proposed were equalised to co-leaders. Candidates matched by Chair and did not know one another, but had chance to get to know one another during recruitment process.
Fun Palaces	NA - founded as co-leadership. One new co-leader was an internal candidate, the other was externally recruited. Candidates did not know one another, but had a chance to get to know one another during recruitment process.
Diverse City	Founder became co-leader over time; formalised into four-way leadership model with joint ADs after starting a family.
Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum	Proposed by candidates who applied together in response to external recruitment for solo CEO. Candidates were friends before working together.
Schools Group (anon)	Request to work PT by solo leader for caring reasons after appointment FT. Chair matched co-leaders who were unknown to one another.
Creative Black Country	Recruited for solo Director but panel decided two roles were needed during selection process. Panel made the match, candidates did not know one another before.
Royal Shakespeare Company	Flexible and inclusive recruitment open to various models. Candidates applied separately and did not know one another.
Rising Arts Agency	Internal reorganisation. Co-leaders selected one another.

3.1.3 Ways of working

Agreement on how to handle disagreements, including not disagreeing publicly

Co-leaders often contract with one another around their ways of working including where they have autonomy to make decisions; where they both wish to be involved in decisions; how any disagreements will be handled; and the length of their commitment to the role. This can take the form of a conversation, or a written document as at RCM and ELD. These conversations are sometimes facilitated by an external coach. They often begin during the application stage in anticipation that these issues may arise at interview. Interviewees noted it was helpful to revisit and update these 'contracts' as roles evolve. Co-leaders at RCM and BMT valued ongoing joint coaching as a space to reflect on and refine their co-leadership practice.

A fairly universal feature of successful co-leadership relationships is the agreement not to disagree publicly, so as to avoid undermining one another and to ensure any conflict is resolved privately.[21] However, others see value in modelling plural views and different ideas, not least as this can embolden others in the organisation to challenge and speak up, as Sandeep Mahal and Justine

Themen have observed. Also if co-leaders agree everything together this can leave others, including the board and the wider senior team, feeling excluded, as Clean Break discovered. Mindful that co-leadership could have felt top-heavy or a bottle-neck for their organisation, Rising Arts Agency have adopted monthly Action Learning sets where anyone can speak to the whole staff, as well as encouraging informal dialogue between staff and the Board.

Frequent and open communication, including availability to one another outside contracted hours

Ensuring that there is sufficient space within roles for regular communication and collaboration was a priority for all co-leaders. Jennifer Jones and Mark Macleod have only one overlapping day per fortnight, so they preserve their precious time together for collaboration by using a shared diary system to log key information that needs to be communicated between them, minimising the time needed for verbal updating. In common with many job sharers (Capability Jane, 2011), including Makala Cheung and Kirsty Lothian at Fun Palaces, Mark and Jennifer have flexible boundaries with one another for contact on their non-working days, using WhatsApp to ask one another quick questions. Keeping one another abreast of their decisions as co-CEOs of BMT, a huge and complex organisation, means Zak Mensah and Sara Wajid have needed to develop a digital system for documenting decisions that minimises duplication. Each co-leadership duo has developed their own communication system. Sajida Carr at CBC explained her scheduled weekly meetings with Parminder Dosanjh have involved into more informal ad hoc catch-ups. Whereas regularly scheduled weekly meetings are important to how the RSC Leadership Associates work together.

Being able to be honest with one another was seen as both a necessity and a virtue of the model. Jennifer Jones explained how in a shared role being honest about mistakes or concerns was crucial, but also relieved some of the pressure that solo leaders can feel.

Shared physical space or equivalent, including overlapping working hours if part-time

Co-leaders are often advised to share a physical office to enable communication, and catching up and working together remains a priority for co-leaders. Interviewees were using technology to stay connected, as well as working asynchronistically at times. For example, with Makala Cheung based in Bristol and Kirsty Lothian based in London, they rely on phone and video calls, and text messaging in-between their monthly face-to-face meetings. Sajida Carr of CBC explained how she might work with Parminder Dosanjh by passing drafts of documents between them to add to and amend, working together at the same time only when needed, such as on organisational planning. A similar 'ideas tennis' model where each co-leader bounces ideas to the other was described by Justine Themen in how she worked with Sandeep Mahal, both of whom work part-time at RSC: "it doesn't mean we necessarily sit together and work it out… Sandy might make a suggestion and I go away and do some work then throw it back".

Commitment to working together for a fixed period

Given the bespoke nature of co-leadership relationships, many commentators suggest it is most successful if co-leaders arrive and depart together (Sally 2002, cited in Denis et al., 2012). Examples of where one co-leader has remained and worked successfully alongside a new partner are rare, although not unknown. Trustees may therefore worry about a situation where one co-leader leaves before the other, resulting in the difficult task of recruiting to match the incumbent, and several of the interviewees expressed the view they would have serious reservations about continuing in the role, long-term, with a different partner. Also, given the importance of equality in these relationships, it could be very difficult for an incoming co-leader to establish equal authority alongside an incumbent with seniority. In most cases it was acknowledged that if one or both co-

leaders left, they would expect the organisation to review whether continuation of co-leadership was the best option and not to be committed to replicating the arrangement.

For this reason, co-leaders often have informal agreements about an in-principle minimum period of commitment to the role, whilst also recognising that personal circumstances may change. Several of the co-leaders interviewed had discussed a minimum period of commitment before applying. Rising Arts Agency have made this explicit and part of their model, with their co-leaders having a fixed-term of five years, to ensure a continued commitment to younger leaders into the future.

Flexibility to deputise for one another when required

Whilst co-leaders have some differentiation of roles and skillsets, there are benefits to pairings which can flex capacity and responsibility according to business need, or in response to an individual's reduced capacity for personal reasons. In the context of a relatively young organisation, the co-Directors of Rising Arts Agency have avoided overly differentiating their roles, partly for their own professional development but also so that their areas of lead responsibility can be adapted to new programmes of work as needed. Similarly at the RSC, the Leadership Associates have been able to flex capacity between them on their joint strategy work, when one had less capacity due to illness; external work commitments; and also in response to staff vacancies. At ACBM, Mark Macleod was able to provide maternity cover for his partner, and similarly Makala Cheung at Fun Palaces increases her days at times when Kirsty Lothian works less due to childcare.

3.1.4 Structure/ role design

Differentiation: shared responsibilities which play to the individuals' strengths, avoiding unnecessary duplication

Historically, differentiation of roles in co-leadership stemmed from avoidance of unnecessary conflict (Denis et al., 2012), but from the recent interviews it seems that contemporary cultural leaders are less concerned about disagreement, and many see pluralism and overlap as valuable. Typical splits tend to be along organisational and artistic lines, but there is no standard template even for formal AD/ED roles, and they are often tailored to the individuals' strengths, the wider staff team capacity and according to the organisation's activities (Antrobus, 2011).

Whilst most pairings broadly split roles according to individual strengths, both Rising Arts Agency and BMT see benefit in some rotation of responsibilities to ensure both leaders develop wide experience. Today's leaders, however, are acutely aware of resource limitations which mean any duplication needs to be minimised. External pressure to have both leaders present in meetings is resisted as far as possible, for example at ACBM and BMT, the exception to this being full board meetings where both co-CEOs attend.

Co-leadership always involves some areas of joint responsibility, or 'shared role space' (Denis et al., 2012). In cultural organisations this is typically around whole organisation strategy such as programming, business planning or equalities and diversity. This means that accountability for co-leaders is usually joint, with co-leaders sharing targets and both reporting to the same line-manager, which for co-CEOs is usually the chair. Sometimes a combination of joint and individual objectives are used when co-leader roles are highly differentiated. Having separate accountability, or unequal levels of scrutiny, is problematic and can lead to tensions between co-leaders (Reid & Fjallvær, 2023).

Equality of workload, pay, and contract terms

Ensuring parity within in co-leadership is important, and co-leaders and their chairs need to be alert to attempts by internal or external stakeholders to divide, favour or undermine one of the partners. In cultural organisations, because of tendency to privilege artistic leadership, there can be a tendency to favour the artistic lead and defer to their authority over their organisational counterpart. In their study of co-leadership in the arts, Reid and Fjallvær (2023) show how corrosive this can be for co-leadership.

Equality in these roles is often undermined unintentionally, particularly if one postholder's workload is out of balance with the other's, which in turn impacts their ability to contribute in shared role space. Similarly, external power dynamics and inequalities can interfere in these relationships, so being alert to this is a key skill for co-leaders. For example, the awareness that higher status or visibility may be afforded to certain aspects of the role, such as public speaking or programming.

Opportunities to learn from one another

Leadership development does not end when someone secures an executive role. Opportunities to learn through experience and reflection are embedded in the co-leadership model, as was noted in Section Two. In all but one case study, co-leaders were also first-time CEOs. A similarly high proportion of case studies were implementing co-leadership for the first time. This suggests that there is both a substantial need and an opportunity for leaders to learn in their roles. This has support and resource implications, as we will see in the following section in terms of what can go wrong with co-leadership, and in the final section which looks at the enablers of and barriers to co-leadership.

3.2 What can go wrong: lessons learned

Sometimes boards dismiss co-leadership as an option because of previous examples where the model has not been successful, assuming the problem is the model *per se*, rather than how well it was implemented. As the circumstances surrounding failed attempts in co-leadership often remain confidential and the fuller story of what led to difficulties is not revealed publicly. By including anonymous examples where co-leadership became very problematic for organisations, I demonstrate the problem is often not with the model itself so much as how well a board, and individual leaders, implement it. In the course of my research I interviewed five individuals who had direct experience of co-leadership which had been problematic; three of these were trustees, and two had been staff members. They were keen to share with others their experience of co-leadership and learning without exposing their (former) organisations or co-workers. The examples and quotes in this section are therefore anonymous to avoid identifying any individuals or organisations.

Below I have listed the key risk factors that have been identified. Notably, even though several of these situations led to serious organisational outcomes, including loss of funding and stakeholder confidence, and negative impacts on the individuals' own employment and mental health, they remained optimistic about the potential of the model:

> I wouldn't, if I had the time machine, I wouldn't stop myself going into that role. I took from it loads of personal growth… and everything I'm doing now is a product of that. So it hurts, but things do. And co-leadership lends itself to some more interesting and more contemporary styles of leadership. It lends itself to complexity, it lends itself to a democratic models of working, to resilience... I do really believe that co-leadership can work well, and the things that can be seen as its limitations can be reframed as really good activism. You just need to have the right stuff in place. (Co-leader)

> There's nothing inherently wrong with co-directorship. I think what is encouraging about co-directorship is that it enables us to think about experiments in leadership. What are the experiments in leadership that are necessary today? What are some radical understandings of what leadership can do? And this is what I felt that in some ways we were trying to do. (Chair)

3.2.1 Compatibility of vision and values

Problems arise when a co-leader does not fully share the values and vision of their partner or subscribe to the core values that underpin co-leadership:

> It became clear that the two had very different visions of what they wanted to do or could do as leaders of the organisation and so that those divisions got deeper and deeper to the point that it caused a rift. (Chair)

> If people come from similar backgrounds, and they haven't worked together, there's a greater likelihood that that they will click. But if people come from pretty different backgrounds, fairly different backgrounds, it makes it more complicated. (Chair)

3.2.2 Lack of clarity of expectations/ delineation of roles

Tensions can arise when responsibilities are shared unequally, or when there are disagreements over where individuals have authority to make decisions unilaterally. Internal and external stakeholders are often negatively impacted if responsibilities are not clearly delineated as this can cause confusion and delays in decision-making. One of the chairs in one of the case studies cited this as being one of the core difficulties that arose for their organisation.[22] In several of the successful case studies, a lack of clarity around roles had initially caused confusion for staff, and for external stakeholders accustomed to a single leader. There was often a period of adjustment when the new model was introduced.

3.2.3 Insufficient support for co-leaders

The executive recruitment specialists interviewed advised that all incoming CEOs should be offered access to external mentoring or coaching, as well as support from their chair. Relatively few of the co-leaders interviewed had regular or formal supervisory meetings with their line-managers. With a high proportion of co-leaders being first-time CEOs, offering support is particularly important. Also as one chair noted, when co-leadership is new to the organisation then there may be a period of adjustment, both for the chair and other employees, in terms of developing new relationships and ways of working. Issues emerge when a chair is not prepared for, or able to offer, the level of support required – particularly if difficulties arise.

The board, and particularly the chair as the line-manager of the co-leaders, have important roles to play in setting a clear framework of accountability but also in offering support. There can be a tendency for charitable boards to focus on risk and to see their role as being primarily to police the performance of the executive. Chairs and co-leaders alike felt strongly that this needed to shift to a more collective approach in which the board share responsibility for success and actively ensure any support needed is in place:

> And so one of the things that kept coming up at Board was that, ‘oh, X & Y don't have the skills’…. And I couldn't disagree more. It's not really about whether X and Y didn't have the skills. It's about what kind of organisation can support them in their vision, because they knew what skills were necessary, for instance, to envision something quite radical and to

> seek funding for that; they knew what it took. So it wasn't the sort of skills that was at stake, it was really a question of where do you support them as a board. (Chair)

A board needs to understand and manage the risks of co-leadership, but also it is responsible for supporting co-leaders effectively. This includes offering external leadership development support, sharing leadership responsibility and being prepared to proactively step in should this be needed. Having a capable and engaged board was seen as a prerequisite for avoiding problems:

> I think a requirement for having this way of working is a is a high functioning board. I think that you amplify your risks by having a board that is unsure or not fully confident. I think you need a few people that absolutely know what they're doing to manage the particular complexities of the joint leadership thing. Co-leadership can work without a brilliant board, it's just all the risks get multiplied, because you don't have the stuff in place to manage it if something starts to go wrong... The chair has to have an appetite and the energy to go with this process. So if I had a checklist as to whether co-leadership could work it would have on it: does the person who is holding this at a governance level have the appetite and the energy, skills and resources to be able to hold this thing? (Co-leader)

3.2.4 Relinquishing of responsibility for holding co-leaders to account

Successful co-leaders often speak about holding one another to account, and often have strategies in place for resolving disagreements. But as wider studies have shown (Reid & Fjallvær, 2023) a primary cause of difficulties in co-leadership is when one co-leader underperforms and this is not tackled in a timely way by the board, which often leads to relationship breakdown between co-leaders. Ultimately, as the employer, it is the board who are responsible for the performance management of the CEO. While failure to hold senior executives to account is not unique to co-leadership, if there are issues with performance where one co-leader is not held to account, the other finds themselves in an invidious position. Often with AD/ED co-leadership models issues there is a pattern where under-performing ADs are not held to account by a board which can be hesitant to 'interfere' with artistic matters, but which is more comfortable in setting budgetary or fundraising targets and holding the ED more closely to account. Worse still, a board may expect the ED to manage the AD by proxy. This often leads to conflict in the AD/ED relationship (Reid & Fjallvær, 2023). One of my interviewees had this experience, having been brought in as an ED to work with a founder AD who resisted making the changes the board expected the senior leadership to deliver:

> Eventually I felt my role became untenable. There's been a bunch of different moments where I was trying to manage the situation and I felt like more and more of my day job was spent doing situation management, from undoing issues created through X's practice, rather than me doing the actual job. And I felt like the Board don't manage them, I still feel that the Board don't, they're scared of X and they don't manage them. (Co-leader)

In this scenario, the outgoing co-leader felt the reluctance to tackle the AD's behaviour was due to widely-held but arguably outdated views around an artistic leader's authority and a belief that it's not the place of the board to question artistic output or artistic decisions.

3.2.5 Power imbalances and equality issues

Equality in co-leadership can be disrupted by many factors including favouritism, unequal capacity to participate, access issues, seniority (i.e. if one co-leader has more experience or their tenure in post predates the other's), being a founder, age, gender, disability, ethnicity, caring responsibilities, or class. Some of these factors can be controlled or avoided, whereas others may need be handled sensitively. For example, most co-leaders work the same contracted hours. Male co-leaders who notice board members are deferring to them over a female counterpart, or an artistic lead who

notices that their executive counterpart receives less recognition from the board, can address this imbalance. Among the case study organisations, several co-leaders had deliberately chosen other women, or other Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people, as co-leaders and could not imagine wanting to partner otherwise. There are also examples of mixed male-female and Black Asian and Ethically Diverse-White co-leadership partnerships, among the case studies.

In several of the failed co-leadership examples, equality issues had caused problems. For one organisation the balance of working hours between co-leaders was unequal, as was the amount of time co-leaders were physically present on-site versus working remotely. In the other example a long-serving AD was effectively granted more power by the board, undermining their counterpart. In two instances, access issues for co-leaders with disabilities contributed to difficulties in being able to operate with parity.

Critically, co-leaders need to be different-but-equal, and to be treated equitably. Another failed example of co-leadership occurred when a board who were keen to recruit a 'global majority' candidate into their leadership position selected a candidate who they felt lacked sufficient experience and so created a co-leadership model with an experienced co-leader. This did not end well; a number of staff left and there was a negative impact on wider organisational performance. As another interviewee commented, boards need to avoid seeing co-leadership as a short-cut to recruiting candidates who are not ready:

> Leadership needs a certain skill set. And emerging leaders must be given both the tools to learn and practice their learning - but also the space to learn, and be supported in their learning journey. Too often emerging leaders are put in leadership roles without supporting them with the resource and support to grow in experience and credibility. Any leader who is put in a leadership role without the appropriate structures and processes in place can find their inexperience exposed without genuine support from their board and organisation. This can provide the organisation with a great 'inclusive' profile but can be detrimental to that individual's experience or future appetite for leadership.

Any new leader will have support and development needs, and one of the key benefits of co-leadership is that it suits those new to leadership and co-leaders can complement one another, but for co-leadership to work well there needs to be equity.

3.2.6 Leadership style and ability

Successful co-leaders need not only to value collaboration and difference, but they need the competencies required to embody these values consistently. This includes the emotional intelligence skills of self-awareness and empathy, and communication and relationship skills including constructive challenge, resolving conflict, facilitation and active listening.

One example where the co-leader relationship failed was attributed to a lack of self-awareness which meant that the co-leader's actions and intentions were not consistently collaborative:

> X genuinely thought they were totally up for co-leadership but when it came to some crucial stuff they certainly were not, and they were not self-aware enough to realize what a problem that was. X genuinely enjoyed having an additional person there to lean on and to share with it's just the ownership thing is a blind spot for them I think. I don't think X recognizes that them holding on to stuff happens. There's a big self-awareness gap, they believe they are having a different effect on the people around them than they actually are. (Co-leader)

3.2.7 Trust

All parties need to be committed to co-leadership, including the board. If co-leaders feel coerced into a partnership, or sceptical about either the model or their partner, this can precipitate difficulties due to behaviour that undermines trust. In the anonymous case studies, when board members had doubts about the model, or the individuals appointed, this created problems around trust which again became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Co-leadership requires a high level of trust. If co-leaders have had a difficult previous experience of collaboration or co-leadership this can lead to them entering a new relationship with reservations. Equally, if boards are reticent about the arrangement and focus on the risks it can precipitate problems by eroding trust with the executive.

Summary

There is a substantial body of existing research that considers the pitfalls of co-leadership and the conditions required for the model to work well, and these findings are echoed by the interviews undertaken for this research. The challenges of co-leadership can readily be surmounted, if a board is willing to embrace and support the model. This requires a chair who is able to offer the co-leaders regular support as well as set clear objectives, and prepared to intervene quickly and decisively should there be issues with performance or should either co-leader need additional support. Care needs to be taken to avoid inequalities in how co-leaders are treated, and interviewees suggested the chair may need to intervene if others seek to divide them or undermine either of them. Recruitment of co-leaders needs to take account of the competencies required for collaboration and to ensure that co-leaders have shared values and vision. Given that co-leadership is still emerging within the UK cultural sectors, opportunities to learn from peers within the sector and beyond it are valuable. Interestingly, the case studies of recent co-leadership models in the cultural sector appear to challenge a few of the established beliefs: suggesting role overlap and pluralism can be valuable, and that with a strong foundation of shared values and collaborative competencies in place co-leaders with no previous relationship can quickly forge successful relationships.

Several successful co-leaders identified that they would benefit from more formal support from their chairs than they had received. There appears to be a squeamishness or assumption that CEOs don't need supervision or line-management in the same way as other employees. Also there is a need for some boards to assume their shared responsibility for leadership, as currently too often this appears to be relinquished to the executive. CEOs are employees, and like another other role, employers have a responsibility to provide supervision via line-management. The interviews suggest that this is far from common practice, but that in successful co-leadership arrangements the board, and particularly the chair, are far more supportive than has often been the case. This is also part of the co-leadership the sector needs, a more effective partnership between executives and the board.

Section 4. Towards greater deployment of co-leadership in cultural organisations

There is clearly huge interest in co-leadership among early and mid-career professionals and significant potential for co-leadership to be part of the wider evolution of leadership structures that the sector will need in order to thrive. Executive recruitment specialists report seeing an increase in enquiries about flexible working and co-leadership, with applicants increasingly wanting to apply on this basis. However, despite the recent growth in co-leadership evidenced by the case studies, it is still far from the norm for boards to actively consider and encourage applications on this basis. This final section explores what limits co-leadership currently, and inversely, identifies the key common features in those organisations who have recently adopted co-leadership, drawing on interviews with sector specialists, individual leaders and trustees, and on the workforce survey.

The main barriers that emerged from the survey and interviews as limiting wider deployment of co-leadership in the UK cultural sector currently are:

1. Lack of information about how co-leadership works, including recruitment and selection
2. A lack opportunities advertised as being open to co-leadership
3. A lack of inclusive leadership recruitment expertise available in-house
4. A preference or assumption that 'real' leaders want to work full-time
5. Fear of conflict between leaders and unclear accountability
6. Concerns about the additional cost involved

4.1 What is limiting greater deployment of co-leadership?

4.1.1 Lack of information about how co-leadership works and is recruited

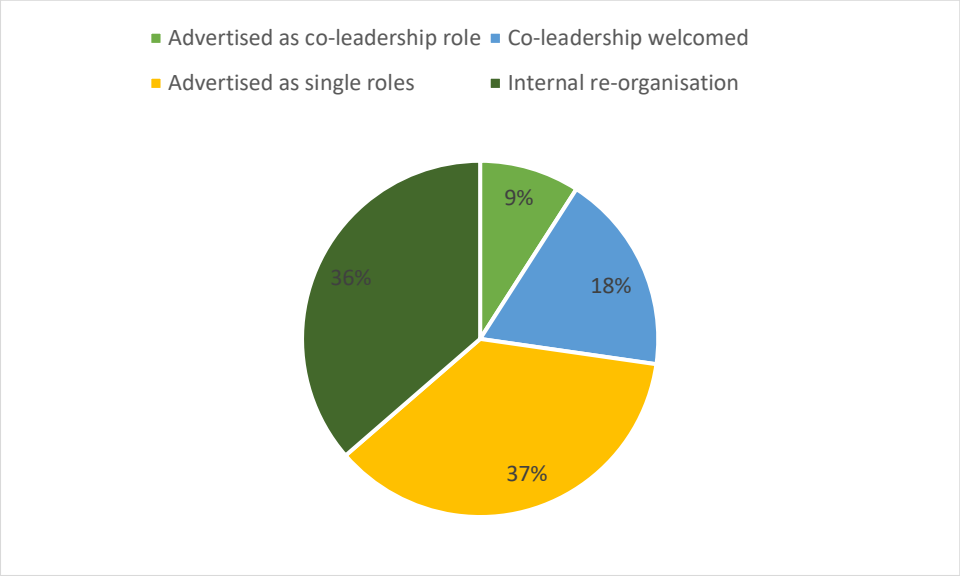
Early and mid-career leaders want to understand the practicalities better. Co-leadership is not yet widely practised or understood; only 26% of survey respondents had experience either of working in a co-leadership role or for an organisation where the model was in use. Slightly more than half felt they had sufficient understanding of co-leadership to determine whether it would be suitable for them. 95% wanted more information about how the application and recruitment process works and 90% wanted to understand more about practical arrangements. Others said they wanted to know more about how to find a partner with whom to apply for a co-leadership role. Several raised questions about whether they could afford to work part-time, suggesting some confusion as to whether co-leadership is always a part-time arrangement.

4.1.2 Very few roles are proactively advertised as open to co-leadership

Almost all (98%) respondents said they did not see many roles advertised on this basis. Within the case study examples only one (Fun Palaces) was externally advertised as a co-leadership role, with RSC and ELD both explicitly encouraging applicants on a flexible basis. Four arose through internal reorganisations (RCM, Rising Arts Agency, Clean Break, Diverse City) and a further two (Schools Group, CBC) resulted from employers changing their leadership model during, or shortly after, recruitment. The other two (BMT and ACBM) were externally advertised as single-leader roles with the applicants proposing a job-share solution. In the case of BMT the Board's initial response was

that they would prefer a single application from the candidates and it was only when Zak Mensah and Sara Wajid declined to apply separately that they were considered as joint applicants. When co-leadership, or flexible models, are not clearly encouraged applicants often conclude they are not welcome.[23]

Chart 1: How case study roles were advertised



4.1.3 Lack of recruitment expertise

Executive recruitment in the UK cultural sector is led by board members, sometimes supported by internal HR specialists or external consultants. The cost of external support can be prohibitive for smaller organisations, and many also lack in-house HR expertise. Conversations with sector specialists suggest that too often when an outgoing leader departs, the board rushes to replace the role without adequately reviewing what is needed, or assessing the market and designing an effective and inclusive recruitment process. Whilst some boards benefit from individual trustees' HR expertise, many organisations lack recruitment expertise, particularly in relation to inclusivity and leadership roles. From a candidate perspective the survey reveals frustrations with narrow interpretation of relevant experience failing to consider a candidate's potential and ability to learn in the role, with appropriate support. 91% of respondents felt employers prefer candidates with track records in similar organisations.

4.1.4 Trustee preference for full-time leaders

Even among employers who have adopted and very much value co-leadership there were initial concerns about the implications of having leaders working part-time. One of the part-time male co-leaders recounts being quizzed as to his motivation for part-time working at interview, which he interpreted as suggesting this was considered as odd. One of the chairs who recruited part-time leaders admitted he was perhaps old-fashioned in this thinking but that he was surprised to find ambitious and capable executive leadership candidates who wanted to work part-time, as this did not fit his traditional view of the driven, ambitious leader. 83% of survey respondents reported that they felt trustees preferred a full-time leader.

4.1.5 Fear of conflict between leaders or lack of accountability

Some boards fear the potential for conflict in co-leadership and the risk that shared responsibility could complicate accountability, as was acknowledged by one of the executive recruitment specialists.[24] One experienced chair in the Schools Group example, however, felt that the risk of not taking a different approach to executive leadership was a far bigger risk in the long-term as without it their organisation was unable to attract and retain the leadership needed. Several other commentators suggested risk-aversion is a far wider issue with charity boards, not limited to recruitment.

4.1.6 Concerns about additional cost

Typical co-leadership arrangements involve some additional cost as the leadership capacity is increased, usually by around 20% in a job-share with two leaders each working three days a week or by 60-100% if two full-time or 0.8FTE roles are created. However, particularly in terms of the job-share arrangements, trustees felt that these arrangements offered excellent value for money compared with a single-leader model. Other organisations that have introduced co-leadership have created resource for this by adjusting the wider staffing structure. Several other case studies where co-leadership was introduced were able to create savings elsewhere in the staff structure as a result of co-leaders taking on responsibility for vacant senior roles that were then able to be supported at more junior levels.

Factors that could enable greater uptake of co-leadership among the workforce include greater transparency and trust around executive recruitment practice; having networks to find potential partners; confidence in collaboration gained through experience with the model or the individual co-leaders; and better information about how co-leadership works. It is hoped Sections Two and Three of this report, the case studies, and Appendix II contribute to addressing this need for information. But it is clear from the research that the real power to increase deployment of co-leadership rests with boards. Looking at the case studies, the majority of whom have recently introduced co-leadership for the first-time, highlights the following four key enablers of change:

1. Leadership from the chair
2. Board confidence in co-leadership or in the individual co-leaders
3. Commitment to collaborative leadership and to increasing diversity
4. Recognition that the models needs to change, and that the co-leadership model supports change

4.2 Enablers of co-leadership

The table below summarises the relevant contextual factors that led to co-leadership emerging as an option, and also highlights the factors identified in interviews that have enabled the model.

Table 8: Summary of the context for opting for co-leadership and what enabled it

Organisation name	Context for introducing model	Key enablers of model
East London Dance	Replacement of outgoing CEO; commitment to increase diversity in leadership	Experienced and supportive chair (CEO and job-share experience, lived experience as working parent); external inclusion consultants (Inc Arts) advised on recruitment
Clean Break Theatre Company	Re-organisation of senior roles when CEO left; desire to better integrate social mission and artistic aims	External coaching support during planning/transition; feminist approach to leadership and commitment to collaboration and flexible working; shift to co-Chair model
Birmingham Museums Trust	Replacement of outgoing CEO; major capital project	Experienced and supportive chair (CEO and job-share experience); used external consultants (Saxton Bampfylde) to advise on recruitment
Royal Museum Cornwall	Major organisational transformation; difficulty recruiting for CEO role; COVID-19; equalizing pay for female peer	Previous experience co-leadership (Chair and co-leader); successful collaborative relationship as colleagues; shared values and vision; complementary skills; external coaching
Fun Palaces	Replacement of founder co-Directors; consciously sought to increase diversity	Wider organisational culture; wider hybrid/flexible working across organisation
Diverse City	Formalisation of co-leadership which had evolved; desire to increase organisational stability and leadership capacity	Successful collaborative relationship as colleagues; shared values and vision
Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum	Replacement of former CEO; small museum - difficult to recruit suitable candidates	Supportive line manager; complementary skills; existing relationship between co-leaders; organisational values align with gender equality and innovation
Schools Group (anon)	Major organisational transformation; difficulty recruiting and retaining staff	Experienced and supportive chair
Creative Black Country	New programme; broad geographical remit and large number of relationships	Wider organisational culture; shared values/ fit with co-leader
Royal Shakespeare Company	Commitment to increase diversity at executive level; major organisational change	Supportive line-managers; shared values/fit with co-leader
Rising Arts Agency	Founder transition; conscious shift to empower younger leaders	Extended and supportive transition with Founder; external support (coaching); strong internal culture of power-sharing

4.2.1 Leadership from chairs

As boards recruit executive leaders it is not surprising that they hold ultimate power over how these roles are configured and recruited. As the chair is usually the line manager of the CEO, this role has particular influence over recruitment. In the three case studies where I spoke with the chair, they had personally made the decision to recruit co-leaders and persuaded their fellow board members that the benefits outweighed the risks. They had also been willing to accept the responsibility and additional support that working with co-leaders meant for them. This meant a far more collaborative and involved leadership role for the chair than is typical for many cultural organisations. Partly this was because, in all of these examples, chairs were working with first-time CEOs. However, speaking more widely with leadership specialists, as well as with board members and leaders involved in co-leadership, a theme emerged about co-leadership requiring a higher-performing board. Arguably, though, what is needed is not something special but rather a core governance responsibility, as cultural strategist Amanda Parker reflected:

> Sometimes boards behave as if their role is to simply check in on matters of governance rather than owning and leading that governance. So I think it is worth reminding boards that the buck stops with the board. And when it comes to supporting the CEO, that support should be one of joint venture: the relationship between CEO and board should be seamless and collaborative, rather than the board standing slightly removed and checking or reviewing. That's the joint leadership we should be talking about.

The Chair of the Schools Group felt the risk involved with co-leadership was less than the risk of not getting the best leader possible, by limiting the talent pool by excluding anyone who cannot work full-time. Her advice to other boards was to "always go with the best candidate, or candidates. Be imaginative and prepared to take risks to make it work".

4.2.2 Board confidence in co-leadership

Confidence can come from many places, including awareness of successful examples, better understanding of the risks and how to mitigate and manage them, and direct experience of co-leadership. Accessing support from experienced recruitment consultants and/or leadership coaches with experience of co-leadership was also helpful in the case study organisations including BMT, ELD, CBC, and Rising Arts Agency. Familiarity often serves to build confidence in leadership (Reid & Fjallvær, 2023). Several case studies (Rising Arts Agency, RCM, School Group, ELD) reveal boards willing to risk a new approach because they knew, and therefore had confidence in, the candidates. In other cases, the chair's experience of job-sharing or co-leadership in other contexts was significant, including for the Schools Group, ACBM, RCM, BMT and ELD.

4.2.3 Commitment to collaborative leadership

Those organisations whose values and vision are rooted in collaboration, and who are committed to equalities, diversity and inclusion appear more likely to adopt co-leadership or another form of plural leadership. For example, whilst the case studies aimed to include organisations across the full range of the cultural sector, there were many to choose from in the youth arts and community engagement or development sectors. Indeed, whereas most of the cultural organisations in the case studies had transitioned to co-leadership, many community-focused organisations to whom sharing power is part of their DNA, such as Fun Palaces, are established on this basis from the outset. Sajida Carr of CBC, a Creative People and Places (CPP) programme explained how despite the original model for tending to have a single Programme Director, she has received many enquiries from the newer CPP programmes interested in replicating their model. Mark Robinson's study of leadership in

the CPP programme highlights a tendency towards plural and what he describes as 'multiplied' models of leadership (Robinson, 2020).

4.2.3 Recognition that the model needs to change and that the model works for change

There are benefits and opportunities in deploying co-leadership, but there are also, increasingly, threats if organisations don't change their approach. Three of the case studies initially had difficulty recruiting into their executive vacancies and either had to re-think or re-advertise. Several found themselves having advertised for single roles but realising that they needed to appoint two people instead. Others, such as ELD had reviewed their approach, with external advice, before advertising. Increasingly, boards are recognising that the way leadership roles have been configured needs to change, to be more inclusive, if they are to attract the leaders needed for the future. We also see from the case studies that organisations who recognise that their wider working practises need to radically change, like RSC, RCM, BMT and Rising Arts Agency are more likely to see the potential in alternative leadership models, including co-leadership.

Recruitment materials from recent leadership roles including those advertised by ELD and the RSC make explicit that the current conditions require new leadership forms.[25] Commentators, and interviewees for this research, make links between addressing issues with exclusionary and ineffective leadership structures and the development of the new business models and ways of working that are clearly needed.[26] Amanda Parker explicitly links greater diversity in leadership with increased abilities to innovate; "an inclusive leadership team can give you a head start in interrogating business assumptions, and bring fresh perspectives that can hugely benefit business practice and outcomes". As the Chair of BMT, Niels de Vos, said when discussing their co-leadership model:

> A lot of organisations are feeling like we can't carry on with business as usual, that we need some quite radical transformation in terms of our business models, the way we work with audiences… and that's not a job for one person.

Conclusions

There is a growing interest in co-leadership in the UK cultural sector, although boards and potential candidates alike lack the information they would like to feel more confident about how co-leadership works in practice. There is some trepidation on the part of boards regarding the potential for conflict or confusion around accountability, although these issues can easily be managed in a well-designed model. There is also concern about the additional costs increasing the number of executive roles: although it is possible to introduce co-leadership at no or marginal additional cost, if job-sharing is used. Similarly, even when two full-time roles are created in place of one, savings can be offset elsewhere in the staffing model, and the case studies suggested that the organisations where co-leadership had been introduced felt that it offered excellent value for money.

Co-leadership works best with a highly-functioning board, and can be more demanding for the chair, particularly as co-leadership often involves first-time CEOs and is often a new departure for the organisation. Not surprisingly, the chair is often a key factor in the adoption and success of co-leadership. Some fear that co-leadership could be more complex in terms of recruitment, although this is more a reflection on the lack of recruitment expertise in-house than a reality. Consequently, co-leadership is rarely encouraged currently, which leads candidates to question whether they would be wasting their time applying on this basis. Even successful co-leadership candidates felt that their applications were scrutinised in terms of how the model would work, far more than they would have been had they applied for a single leader role.

Co-leadership is a model that offers a wide range of benefits to cultural organisations and yet whilst we are seeing greater uptake of the model since the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of respondents in the workforce survey said that they rarely saw roles advertised on this basis. It is significant how few of the case studies were advertised as co-leadership roles. Either candidates proposed this option, or those recruiting realised during the process that the organisations' needs would be better met through appointing more than one candidate. In other cases co-leadership emerged as an option as a result of internal re-organisation.

Co-leadership is not a panacea for the many challenges facing UK cultural organisations in the 2020s or the barriers to leadership progression for minoritized leaders; nor does it not suit every organisation or every leader. Nor is it a quick fix to increase diversity: co-leaders need to be ready and well-supported by a competent board. It does, however, lend itself very well to the uncertain, highly-accountable and complex context in which cultural organisations are operating, and it is no coincidence that we see a growing interest in this model in other sectors internationally. It can be a far more inclusive model than the single leadership role, not least as it enables job-sharing and flexible working. Different leadership models or structures alone are never the only solution: they need to be implemented well and any change of leadership structure, and leadership personnel, requires support. But providing that co-leadership is well-managed and supported by the board, I strongly recommend more organisations consider this option, especially if they are seeking to increase diversity. In addition to offering a leadership approach which enables improved performance and innovation, co-leadership can increase the diversity of those involved in leadership at a time when the UK cultural sector needs to draw on the full talent available to respond to the challenges ahead. Responsibility for affecting this change, however, rests not only with the executive but also with boards who need to be become equal partners in co-leadership.

Section five: summary of key findings and implications

This final section of the report summarises the key findings from across the previous four sections, noting the implications for those with an interest in diversifying leadership: boards, current and potential leaders; funders and those involved with leadership development and executive recruitment.

The case for increasing use of co-leadership

The cultural sector needs new leadership competencies and structures to respond to an increasingly complex and challenging operating context
There is a growing recognition that the heroic leadership model no longer serves organisations or individual leaders well, as evidenced by growing interest in alternative models, reports of burnout and difficulty attracting and retaining senior executives. Across a range of sectors internationally, commentators are indicating there needs to be a shift towards more collaborative leadership styles and structures in response to the VUCA operating context. As the cultural sector seeks new operating models, in this period of enormous change, co-leadership offers greater potential for innovation, resulting from the increased diversity it entails. Two heads are - literally - better than one. Practically, co-leadership is seen to offer organisations a wider range of leadership capabilities and capacity, as well as greater stability during periods of leadership transition.

The cultural sector lacks diversity at an executive level
In the UK cultural sector, the senior executives in leadership roles too often do not reflect the diversity of our wider society in terms of ethnicity, gender or disability. There is both a moral imperative and a strong business case to end this discrimination. Various studies have demonstrated that diversity of the workforce is associated with improved performance, particularly in terms of innovation. Consequently our cultural organisations are not accessing the full range of talent available for leadership at time when we need the best talent to chart a course through these very troubled waters.

Current cultural leadership norms and roles are exclusionary
A tendency for heroic and charismatic leadership in the cultural sector, coupled with a highly challenging external context, means that executive roles are widely agreed to have become unrealistic. 76% of survey respondents felt senior roles were unmanageable. The literature review suggests over-demanding roles disproportionately disadvantage those minoritized in the workplace who are less likely to be seen as capable of, or see themselves as qualified to apply for, them. The traditional view that ‘power can never be shared’ is still held by some, as it the assumption that ambitious leaders prefer to work full-time. 83% of survey respondents reported that employers preferred full-time leaders, in their experience. These cultural norms particularly disadvantage disabled people: interviewees and survey responses revealed people lack confidence that requests for reasonable adjustments will be supported and either decide not to waste their efforts applying or choose not to share their disability with their potential employer, lest this disadvantage their application.

Co-leadership can encompass the benefits of collaboration and the ‘diversity dividend’
The benefits of co-leadership in the case study organisations have been replicated in wider studies of co-leadership in other sectors. These benefits are an excellent fit for the challenges facing the UK cultural sector, including that co-leadership enables a broader range of experience, perspectives and skills in leadership roles; facilitates more integrative and innovative solutions to the complex

challenges the sector is facing; attracts (and retains) a more diverse and therefore richer talent pool; improves performance; and offers value for money. Greater diversity in teams, when well-managed, leads to improved performance, productivity, greater innovation and richer solutions to complex problems. There is a clear correlation between these benefits and the challenges currently facing cultural organisations, as well as the barriers to leadership progression for those minoritized in the workforce.

Co-leadership is attractive to those minoritised in the cultural workforce
A small number of survey respondents and interviewees were not interested in co-leadership, preferring solo roles. Some voiced concern that by advocating for co-leadership as a mechanism to increase diversity it could be interpreted that minoritized leaders are incapable of solo roles. Notwithstanding these views, there was a very significant level of interest in co-leadership from survey respondents. 88% of survey respondents felt co-leadership would widen the talent pool. A significant number of leaders of case study organisations said they would not have applied for single leadership roles at this stage in their careers.

Co-leadership facilitates flexible working
Co-leadership can more readily be organised on a flexible basis, taking the form of senior job-sharing. This is significant, in terms of diversity, as wider studies have shown flexibility to be the key enabler of greater workforce diversity in terms of gender. Furthermore, the ability to work flexibly emerges as a key consideration in the survey. 52% of survey respondents said caring responsibilities would stop them considering more senior roles. 94% would value job-sharing specifically and 70% wanted flexibility more widely (part-time, flexible working hours or compressed hours) as an option when applying for senior roles.

Co-leadership is perceived as an alternative to heroic leadership model and enables a wider collaborative organisational culture
There is also a political angle to the increased interest in co-leadership. Solo and heroic models are associated with patriarchal and colonial leadership discourse, with co-leadership positioned in opposition by those wishing to challenge these ways of working. Organisations which seek to share power widely, by working in collaboration with communities or partner organisations, often adopt co-leadership structures. Similarly organisations wanting to encourage collaboration across different teams internally see co-leadership as reflecting structurally, and enabling, their wider organisational culture.

Co-leadership creates opportunities as it suits first-time CEOs and increases the number of leadership positions
All but one of the co-leaders in the case study organisations were in their first CEO role. Working alongside a peer offers greater support and learning opportunities, meaning co-leadership works particularly well for those new to a CEO position. As co-leading involves sharing responsibility it is perceived as being less intimidating, appealing to first-time CEOs who do not consider themselves ready for solo leadership roles. By doubling the number of executive positions, co-leadership increases the number of opportunities for individuals to gain experience and visibility. In the case study organisations, co-leadership has increased the diversity of leadership, resulting in more visible role models that better reflect the UK's population in terms of ethnicity, disability and gender.

Co-leadership does not necessarily increase leadership costs and can be good value
In most case studies introducing co-leadership had increased the executive salary costs, but by considerably less than might be expected. Costs are tight for all cultural organisations, and none could afford to double their executive salary costs. Either co-leaders were appointed part-time, or their appointment was enabled by savings elsewhere in the wider structure. When job-sharing

formed part of a co-leadership arrangement there was always over-lap of between 0.5 to 1 day per week. Sometimes this entailed an increase from 1 to 1.1. or 1.2 FTE salaries, meaning the total salary cost increased by 10-20% compared with a single role, but other organisations achieved co-leadership at no additional cost by having two 0.5FTE roles alternating 2-3 day weeks, enabling 1 day of overlap per fortnight. Cost and value are not the same thing, and all case studies felt co-leadership offered exceptional value for money. A recent study, in the commercial sector, suggests co-leadership even increases profitability.

How to ensure co-leadership works well

Selecting a co-leadership model alone does not guarantee success
It is important to explore what enables co-leadership to work well, and what problems can arise, because any model needs not only to be a good fit for the context but also well executed. A corollary finding is that when co-leadership fails, this does not necessarily prove it is the model itself that is flawed and indeed in this research failure occurred due to poor execution of the model. It is therefore important that boards considering deploying co-leadership understand not only the conditions required for its success, but equally the common pitfalls and how they can be avoided.

Co-leadership involves additional risk but this can be easily managed by a competent board
A well-functioning, and supportive, board is a pre-requisite for introducing co-leadership successfully. Given co-leadership also often involves first-time CEOs, and any change in leadership structure will involve an adjustment for internal and external stakeholders, Chairs working with co-leaders reported a need for greater involvement than typical with single CEOs. Effective co-leadership requires collaborative competencies and shared values and vision. If it emerges there is significant difference of values and vision, or a lack of the necessary skills on either part, then the Board need to be prepared to act.

Co-leaders need to have collaborative skills and complementary competencies, agreed ways of working and roles which are well-designed
Responsibilities are usually differentiated, although crucially there is shared responsibility for the core strategy and capacity to collaborate. Both co-leaders need excellent collaborative competencies including high levels of self-awareness, ability to build trust and navigate difference constructively. They must develop effective ways of working that facilitate communication and achieve role clarity to avoid confusion for wider stakeholders. Overall responsibility is shared and accountability joint rather than split. Many co-leaders contract informally before applying for a role jointly, including by discussing how they wish to handle disagreements and a minimum period commitment to working together. Because co-leaders need to be complementary, and able to work as equals, they are best appointed together and it can be problematic if one co-leader leaves before their partner.

Co-leadership thrives on differences, but is rooted in shared values
Co-leadership works best when individual leaders bring different perspectives, skills, styles or working and areas of expertise into their shared leadership role. Shared values and vision are the bedrock of any co-leadership relationship, and can enable new relationships to develop rapidly. Effective co-leaders are masters of collaboration, they can quickly resolve unproductive conflict around status or arising from routine tasks, enabling a focus on ‘subject conflict’: the generative exploration of difference that leads to innovation.

The assumption that power-sharing is doomed to failure looms large for some
Power imbalances can de-stabilise co-leadership relationships, and it is not unusual for external and stakeholders to seek to undermine co-leaders if they are more comfortable with a solo leader model. Wider structural imbalances within the leadership pairing can also lead to difficulties, for example if one receives more recognition. Also, if co-leaders, or the board, enter into co-leadership with reservations then this can undermine the trust which is necessary for these relationships to develop and precipitate failure through micro-management.

Boards need to be key partners in co-leadership
Boards share responsibility for leadership of cultural organisations, but too often relinquish this responsibility to the executive, preferring to adopt more of risk monitoring role. Also, line-management of CEOs doesn't happen systematically in the cultural sector. Whilst not unique to co-leadership, it means that leaders do not always receive the support or accountability required. This can be problematic for co-leadership pairings if one co-leader is underperforming and the board fail to take timely action. Also there can be a tendency for boards to expect the executive to shoulder too much leadership responsibility. Where co-leadership had been introduced in the case studies, it was often enabled and supported by a chair who had championed the model within the wider board. Chairs working with co-leaders need to be prepared to work more closely with co-leaders who are often also first-time CEOs or navigating the transition to a new leadership model for the organisation.

The current state of co-leadership in the UK cultural sector

Co-leadership is not yet widely encouraged by employers
Co-leadership roles are still not openly advertised on a regular basis. 98% of survey respondents said they did not often see co-leadership roles advertised. Among the case study organisations, only 9% had advertised the opportunity as co-leadership: with a further 18% of employers encouraging a range of types of applications. Far more common is that co-leadership arrangements emerge during internal restructures (36%) or when candidates responded jointly to a role that was advertised as a solo leadership opportunity (37%).

Co-leadership is viewed with caution by some employers
Boards have concerns about conflict and potential lack of accountability with co-leadership. Fears around the risks of co-leadership can be the result of examples where co-leadership ended badly, where there is a tendency to assume it is the model itself that is at fault rather than how the model was implemented. Confidentiality around performance issues of individuals, and poor employment practice, means the full facts of examples of failure are rarely in the public domain. The wider literature is consistent in identifying what needs to be in place of co-leadership to thrive, and how to manage the additional risks. With good recruitment practice, management and governance in place there is no reason co-leadership cannot work well. In the four examples considered where co-leadership relationships had failed, the key factors which had caused issues were all known risks which, arguably, could have been better-managed by the boards and individual leaders involved.

Organisations often lack recruitment expertise and this impacts executive recruitment
Executive recruitment is often led by the board and many organisations lack the expertise to undertake an inclusive and effective recruitment process. Whilst larger organisations may invest in external executive search and recruitment consultancy, many perceive the cost to be prohibitive and manage the process in-house.

Co-leadership is not yet well-understood by Boards or the wider workforce
Co-leadership is not widely understood by Boards or the cultural sector workforce. Many potential applicants appear to be confused as to whether employers would only consider co-leadership as a job-share, which is not surprising given the lack of transparency in terms of how some co-leadership appointments have been made. Potential applicants have concerns about the affordability of working part-time and some are not sure how to find a job-share partner or co-leader. Boards appear to scrutinise co-leadership applications more closely, wanting to explore the details of logistics during the selection process.

Co-leadership presents a useful opportunity to increase the diversity of leadership in the cultural sector, but far wider action is required
Increased deployment of co-leadership will increase diversity in the cultural sector. It is however not the only intervention needed to achieve greater diversity. The literature review highlighted other major barriers to leadership progression including the endemic culture of over-working, poor employment and recruitment practice (including particularly the lack of flexible working options) and a mis-placed belief that the cultural sector is a meritocracy. 95% of survey respondents felt that not everyone had equal chance to succeed in the cultural sector, regardless of background. A more inclusive leadership model is a very helpful step towards increasing diversity, but it needs to be well-managed and supported by the board, and other actions will be required to achieve more representative leadership.

Implications for executive recruitment

Consider co-leadership as an option when recruiting – executive search or in-house HR specialists are advised to discuss co-leadership as an option with boards appointing to CEO or other executive roles. Boards are encouraged to consider co-leadership as an option and to ensure the recruitment process, materials and budget reflects this.

Ensure executive roles are realistic – being over-optimistic about the range of experience expected will discriminate against Black, Asian and Ethically Diverse people, disabled people and women. Consider the job description and person specification carefully, and avoid over specifying either.

Check staff are not consistently overworking – boards have a responsibility for ensuring an organisation has sufficient resources to achieve its strategy, and for compliance with relevant legislation including around employment, health and safety and equalities. Monitoring working hours and ensuring organisations align their priorities and resources better would begin to address this important issue.

Encourage co-leadership explicitly during recruitment – boards who are open to receiving co-leadership applications, including those that might involve flexible working, are advised to be more explicit in their recruitment materials and processes to counter-balance the perception that Boards prefer solo and full-time candidates. It is also important to have considered upfront whether and how joint applications will be considered, and to communicate this transparently, not least to be fair to single applicants.

Allow for collaboration as well as coordination in role design and resource planning – co-leadership involves working together, not splitting responsibilities in two. There needs to be joint accountability and shared responsibility, as well as scope for differentiation. Roles which are over-loaded unrealistically, or job-share arrangements with minimal cross-over make collaboration less feasible.

Select for different and complementary skills, backgrounds, approaches and expertise but look for shared values and vision – difference is essential, but needs a solid foundation to thrive. Co-leaders with a shared outlook can very quickly develop a strong relationship and evolve ways of working, so long as they possess core collaborative competencies and subscribe to a collaborative ethos.

Ensure both leaders are committed to and capable of co-leadership – the skillset required includes highly developed communication, collaboration and emotional intelligence abilities. Equally important is that co-leadership is entered into willingly, with a commitment to working with their counterpart as an equal. Co-leadership is not an easy option, or a quick fix for diversifying leadership by appointing people not yet ready for this responsibility. Candidates need to be suitably skilled and experienced, and properly supported.

Recruit co-leaders together - Whilst co-leaders do not necessarily need to demonstrate a long-track record of collaboration with one another, ideally they will have applied together. On the rare occasions that co-leadership is suggested by an employer, there should be an opportunity for both parties to get to know one another before deciding whether to accept, and it would be advisable to ensure a formal probation period is carefully supervised by the chair. If one co-leader is ready to move on before the other then there will need to be consideration of whether co-leadership is still the best model and whether it is feasible to introduce a new co-leader alongside an established one. This is possible, but requires considerable skill and support on the part of the co-leaders, as well as careful selection and supervision by the Chair.

Invest in external leadership and recruitment expertise – few organisations have in-house or via their board access to the expertise, networks or skills to undertake inclusive executive recruitment well. Consider investing in external consultancy or coaching support during the planning, recruitment and onboarding of co-leaders.

Check the board has the ability and capacity to participate in co-leadership – in particular the chair needs to understand the level of commitment involved to support a new co-leadership team and be prepared to intervene if necessary. Boards who are unwilling or unable to share leadership responsibility are encouraged to seek support around governance development before considering co-leadership.

Implications for organisations with co-leadership already in place

Create a shared 'contract' that covers responsibilities and working practices – ensuring clarity of respective roles, including where there is shared responsibility, and agreeing how disagreements will be handled. This should be revisited and update periodically.

Ensure all CEOs have regular supervision and performance reviews – as co-CEOs are jointly accountable they normally share performance objectives, although individual co-leaders may also have additional individual areas of responsibility. Periodic formal of performance and development is the responsibility of a good employer, alongside more regular informal support.

Create a reflective space - co-leaders benefit from regular review of their the working relationship, this might be facilitated by their line-manager, or an external leadership coach.

Be careful to treat co-leaders equitably – leaders and those supporting, need to be watchful to avoid inadvertently undermining the equality at the heart of successful co-leadership relationships.

Implications for leadership development professionals and programmes

Increase awareness of co-leadership models – potential candidates and employers alike were keen to hear more examples of where the model had been used in practice.

Facilitate peer-learning for co-leaders – many co-leaders are still experimenting with their working practices and those interviewed were keenly interested to learn from others via informal networks or Action Learning Sets.

Increase understanding of executive recruitment practice, including for co-leadership roles – invite those with experience of recruitment to share their perspectives with potential candidates to increase transparency around recruitment processes. Further research to better understand current executive recruitment practice would be particularly valuable.

Develop understanding of good governance practice – to empower executive leaders to ask for the support they need from their boards to jointly share risk and responsibility.

Contribute to discussions of the wider changes needed to create greater leadership diversity – including addressing the leadership discourse that normalises endemic and discriminatory over-working practices in the wider sector.

Encourage mastery of collaboration, emotional intelligence and values-based leadership – many of the leadership competencies required for co-leadership already form part of the programmes of leadership courses. Of particular value to co-leaders, although useful more widely too, is the ability to embrace complexity and difference constructively and navigate power imbalances sensitively. Also, co-leaders need to be proficient in enabling psychological safety and encouraging plural contributions from one another and their wider teams. Awareness of their own values, and ability to articulate these and use them to guide how they work with others is another critical skill.

Appendix I: Summary of organisational features of case study organisations

Org name	Model	Sub-sector	New model?	Flexible working (FTE = Full Time Equivalent)	Diversity of leaders (in relation to gender, ethnicity, disability)	First-time CEOs	Who do co-leaders report to?	Start date
East London Dance	co-CEO	Dance	Yes	Yes - both 0.6FTE	2 women, 1 of whom person of colour	Yes	Chair of Trustees	Oct 21
Clean Break Theatre Company	co-AD within 3 CEO model	Theatre	Yes	Yes - all 3 CEOs work 4 days week	3 women	Yes	Chair of Trustees	2018
Birmingham Museums Trust	co-CEO	Museums	Yes	Yes - both 0.6FTE, one day overlap per week	1 woman, 2 people of colour, 1 parent	Yes	Chair of Trustees	Nov 20
Royal Museum Cornwall	co-CEO	Museums	Yes	Yes – both FT, flexible working across team	1 woman	Yes	Chair of Trustees	Apr 22
Fun Palaces	co-CEO	Community arts	No	Yes - both PT, hours vary from 2-4 days	2 women, 1 British Chinese	Yes	Parent organisation CEO	Apr 21
Diverse City	co-AD in 4-CEO model	Multi	Yes	Yes - 1 of 4 is 0.8 FTE, 1 works school hours	3 women, 1 person with disability	Yes	Board	2018
Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum	co-CEO	Museums	Yes	Yes - both 0.5TFE, alternate 2-3 day weeks, 1 day overlap per fortnight	I woman (parent)	Yes	Parent organisation CEO	Sep 21
Schools Group (anon)	co-CEO	Education sector	Yes	Yes - 1 0.7FTE, 1 0.4FTE	1 woman (carer)	Yes	Chair of Governors	2018
Creative Black Country	co-CEO	CPP	Yes	Yes - 1 FT, 1 0.8FTE	2 British Asian women	Yes	Parent organisation CEO	2014
Royal Shakespeare Company	Leadership Associate	Theatre	Yes	Yes - both 0.8FTE	2 women of colour	No	Executive and Artistic Director	Jan 22
Rising Arts	co-CEO	Youth arts/ leadership	Yes	Yes - all staff work 4 days week	2 women, 1 of whom person of colour	Yes	CIC Board	Sep 21

Appendix II: Case Studies

Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum
Tried and trusted: building confidence in co-leadership for the first-time

Andrew Carnegie Birthplace is a small museum in Dunfermline which forms part of the wider Carnegie Dunfermline Trust. The museum is based in Carnegie's humble childhood home and tells the story of a man who became one of Scotland's most celebrated entrepreneurs and philanthropists. Mark Macleod and Jennifer Jones were appointed as the museum's first job-share co-leaders in 2021. It was the first time either Mark or Jennifer had job-shared, and a new model for the museum which, like the vast majority of organisations in this sector, had historically had a more traditional single-leader model.

Mark and Jennifer already knew one another well, as fellow professionals and friends, but had not worked together before applying for the role. When the role was initially advertised, job-sharing was not mentioned, so Mark contacted the Trust's CEO to enquire if they would be receptive to an application on this basis. The response was positive, but it became apparent during the two-stage interview process that the Trustees needed reassurance that the model could work. After a standard competency-based first interview, at the next stage the practicalities of the arrangement were tested thoroughly. This included exploring how candidates would handle any disagreements and how they would share responsibilities, as Jennifer explains:

> There were a lot of questions about how we would approach this, and how we would split the time, which is quite hard when you don't know the role yet! It did feel like we had to convince them it could work. We had to make the case.

Small museum leadership roles can be demanding, as the breadth of skills required is difficult to find in one person. These roles are often seen as a 'stepping stone' role for those keen to work in larger civic or national museums and Trustees can struggle to attract and retain leaders with the experience needed. These challenges may have encouraged the Trustees to consider a different model which offered them a solution to the challenge. As Jennifer explains:

> You can get burned out in these small roles as much as you can in the big museums. They were looking for people who would stay, who were looking for something to get their teeth stuck into rather than a stepping stone. And this arrangement allows us both to do that.

Mark and Jennifer bring a depth and breadth of museum and leadership experience it would be difficult to find in a single individual, for the salary a small independent museum can offer. Mark explained that they submitted a joint letter of application with their CVs in the same formats so that Trustees could easily see how they were "getting 23 years of experience between us at a very modest cost".

In terms of how they work, Mark and Jennifer formally share the Museum Manager role, with each working 0.5FTE, structured as alternating 2-3 day weeks, overlapping one day per fortnight. With complementary skills, experience and networks in engagement and collections, they each lead distinct areas of the museum's work and share responsibility for overall strategy. Neither Mark nor Jennifer would have applied for the role as a solo position. Mark enjoys the breadth of the role, but prefers to do this alongside more specialist freelance projects. Jennifer has a young family and doesn't see herself wishing to work full-time in the near future. After having her first child in 2019, she was struggling to find suitably challenging work that offered flexibility. She was taking a break from work after a poor experience of flexibility in her last role and feeling a bit stuck:

> I couldn't really think of a way that would allow me to progress my career rather than just finding a job that suited me practically but where I wasn't going to be challenged in the right way. And so when this came up it seemed to offer something a bit broader, something I

> could really get my teeth into. I like small museums much more than I like national museums, but the work life balance can be very poor… so I would never in 100 years have applied for it myself. And so when Mark approached me, it seemed like a great solution.

Recently the job-sharing arrangement has changed to accommodate a maternity leave period for Jennifer as her second child was born in September 2022, with Mark increasing his working hours temporarily to cover Jennifer's absence. They had discussed Jennifer's plans to extend her family before applying jointly and they were both consulted on a range of options to cover the maternity leave. The option of Mark stepping in worked best for them as their partnership feels unique, leading them to wonder whether they could conceive of co-leading in this role with anyone else. Their strong personal relationship, shared values and complementary skillset leads them to conclude it would be hard to recreate this partnership with another person if either were to move on.

As well as offering an unparalleled range of skills, the job sharing offers Mark and Jennifer a supportive structure for developing as first-time organisational leaders. They have learned about one another's specialisms, and they have noticed that by working alongside an equal there is greater rigour in their work. So that they can pick up one another's work flow, they have become more explicit about their process and reasoning, which in turn is improving the quality of their work. They are one another's critical friend, and benchmark, holding one another to account but also offering support when things have not gone perfectly or if tempted to over-work. Responsibility and risk is shared, as is success:

> We do make mistakes, and we can tell each other and the other person says 'don't worry, we'll fix it. Don't worry about it'. The responsibility gets taken off your shoulders a bit as well.

The main challenge they have found around co-leadership is how others perceive it. There can be a reluctance to accept one co-leader has authority to speak for both:

> Sometimes we both get invited to meetings and we have to say, 'You don't need us both there. We make the same decisions.'

On occasions, for existing staff who were sceptical about the new model, the job-sharing arrangement was perceived as causing issues around communication. However, whilst some may fear the model is more complicated and expensive, the financial cost is neutral: there are some savings on National Insurance which are offset by slightly higher IT and line-management costs of having two roles. One full-time salary is shared between two people which means Mark and Jennifer have to be incredibly efficient in how they coordinate their shared responsibilities and operate with high levels of mutual trust and transparency. They have developed a simple but effective system for communicating with one another based on documenting key decisions and processes in a shared paper diary, supplemented with an understanding they can contact one another on their days off, if necessary, via WhatsApp. They also accept they may at times do things differently, but on the key issues they see eye-to-eye and as well as their formal information sharing via the diary, they have formal fortnightly overlap days when they often schedule core meetings. The final ingredient of their success has been their line-manager who has been supportive of their flexible working from the outset.

Gillian Taylor, CEO of the Carnegie Dunfermline and Hero Fund Trusts to whom Mark and Jennifer report added:

> I have been absolutely delighted with way Mark and Jennifer have embraced the museum manager role as co-leaders. Their skills are varied and complementary and it has given me such peace of mind to have two, professional competent people job-sharing. They have brought fresh ideas and innovation to our little gem of a museum. Andrew Carnegie told us to be pioneering and try new things, so we always try to follow his wishes. I also believe that by giving my team flexibility and a good work-life balance, people naturally shine.

Birmingham Museums Trust

Two heads are better than one

Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) is a large and complex group of museums based in England's second city – home to a diverse and young population. In November 2020, BMT's Trustees appointed Zak Mensah and Sara Wajid as the first joint CEOs of a major UK museum. Both are first-time CEOs. Zak is the parent of young children and both Zak and Sara are people of colour working in a part of the cultural sector which has a particularly poor track record of diversity at a senior level. BMT's story of co-leadership tells of the benefits of co-leadership for the organisation, but also of two people ready for their first major organisational leadership roles but wanting to work part-time. It is also an example of a large organisation embracing senior job-sharing for the first time.

When the CEO role was advertised, despite being considered highly credible individual candidates and approached to apply on that basis, Zak and Sara decided to apply as a 'joint ticket'. Their personal circumstances and the scale and complexity of the role meant both preferred a job-share option. With two track records, and two different sets of skills to offer, the demands of the role felt more realistic as Zak explains:

> The original job description was basically a wish list. They wanted someone who was amazing at 20 or 30 things, but that doesn't exist. There's not a single person who can be an expert at getting capital money and being transformational etc. And between two people, we definitely covered a lot more of the board's wish list.

Whilst Sara felt she would excel in, and relish, some parts of the role, she considered the scale and complexity necessitated two people:

> It's a complex organization. It's a big task, and there are things about it that really, really appealed to me that I thought I could really do brilliantly. But there are other things about it that are massive and emotionally very taxing. And I thought it's going to take two to achieve that breadth, to do justice to the complexity of the challenges in that organization and the potential that I see in Birmingham.

As the father of two young children, Zak was concerned about the impact of the demands of the role on his family responsibilities:

> Having young kids, I was really worried about making the next step into being a chief exec or any senior role, when the demands are high. So I felt a little bit stuck…and I had been watching this program on Netflix about the gender pay gap, and basically this documentary was showing evidence that once you have kids, your career basically slows down or stalls. And so when the opportunity for this job came up, I thought I want to demonstrate that co-leadership is possible because it offers another way. So rather than having someone like me not apply for the job, surely there must be a way for this to work.

Whilst they did not know one another very well initially, having met via the Museum Detox network, they quickly realised that they could work together. Both had experience of job-sharing before; Zak's wife is in a job-share role and Sara had shared a role earlier in her career so felt comfortable about how to make the model work. Once they decided to apply jointly they undertook a thorough preparation, including paying for coaching support to prepare their CVs and practise for the interview. Zak describes the matching that happened being around their shared vision and values, as well as valuing Sara as someone from whom he can learn:

> You've got to have a shared vision, and you both have to have values that you believe in. And Sara's values are very much in alignment with mine - that was quite important…I also think it's really important to try and find someone that you can learn from. I learn from Sara

> every day. This is a really cheeky sneaky opportunity for me to do CPD by learning from someone else who's amazing, amazingly talented.

So despite not knowing one another very well, realising their values and vision were aligned, and having confidence in the co-leadership model, they felt confident to propose themselves as job-share candidates for a role that was advertised as a solo CEO role.

When the joint application was presented to the Board it met a little bit of resistance as Zak explains:

> From the way it was communicated to us by Ed [Bampfylde, of Saxton Bampfylde Global Executive Search] was that maybe you could put in separate applications because if one of you gets the job you can always appoint the other as your number two. And we didn't fancy that. So we batted that back and just said, 'No, we'll do it together'.

BMT's Chair, Niels de Vos, remembers being surprised when they received a job-share application as this did not fit with the 'very traditional lens' through which they initially viewed the role. He was impressed though, when the pair persisted as joint candidates crediting them for being 'quite brave' in sticking to their guns and opening the Board's eyes to a new way of thinking about the role. In fact the Board quickly realised that their proposal made a lot of sense, particularly in the context of re-imagining the museums' purpose and model when having a wider range of skills and perspectives was deemed by the Board to be 'clearly very advantageous':

> They forced us to look at it in a way that I hadn't assumed we would. But it didn't take me long to realize it makes quite a lot of sense. Because it's almost impossible to find all the qualities you want in one person anyway, for any job, never mind a CEO role…it's very rare to get someone with all the skills you want. So it didn't actually require a great leap of faith and it didn't take me long to be convinced. So then we obviously invited them to interview against other people, and as a pair. And guess what, unsurprisingly, between them they covered more of the bases of what we needed than any single individual could, so it almost guaranteed that they were going to get the job – once we accepted that we were happy for it to work as a job share.

Niels is an experienced CEO in the sports sector, and he realised that in his own professional life, the complexities of balancing civic, commercial, sports considerations and stakeholders meant that increasingly he was encountering forms of shared leadership at the executive level. He'd also previously worked with a joint leadership team in his role as Chair of the World Championships in the USA. The main challenge Niels perceives with BMT's co-leadership model is around having part-time senior roles – the solution to which in their case is having a Chair who 'leans in a bit more' and makes sure that the Co-CEOs operate, and are regarded as, equals.

Unlike co-leaders where there is a tradition of sharing senior roles, such as the Artistic/Executive Director role in theatre, Sara and Zak have had the additional task of delineating their roles and forging their ways of working from scratch. By each working three days a week, they cover a full-time working week between them with one day of overlap, which is widely understood to be essential in job-sharing to enable the added value that collaboration brings. As Zak says, "that's where the magic happens when we're both bouncing things off each other". Having mapped out the main areas of responsibility, they then needed to decide who would lead on what, and which areas they needed to lead jointly, whilst minimising duplication. Zak's expertise around organisational transformation, digital and innovative working practices has guided their experiments in how they communicate around decision-making to avoid inefficiencies and enable two people to share a role which is responsible for a lot of decisions.

For BMT, there are multiple benefits of their co-leadership model including greater organisational resilience during a period of socio-economic turbulence externally and a major capital project, and a wider breadth of expertise, perspectives, networks and style than could be found in a single

individual. And as the population BMT exists to serve includes significant Black and Asian communities, a leadership team that visibly reflects local demographics is another asset.

Also, Sara attributes her lived experience of cultural difference as predisposing her to valuing the collaborative ethos underpinning BMT's relationships with its communities and its organisational culture. Sara explains this in terms of her early experience of 'constantly slightly reorienting', having grown up in an immigrant family with a very different culture to the White world outside the home. This constant noticing of the plural ways of being and doing, and the consequent questioning of cultural norms is similar to her experience of working collaboratively with Zak, whose style is different to her own:

> Something happens to you in terms of your elasticity around culture and yourself and your understanding of yourself in the world when you're constantly kind of going 'Oh, they wash up like that?' or 'We've not got godparents, what's a god parent?' It kind of develops an elasticity. And also by seeing and working alongside someone who's quite different from you, particularly, I think it probably makes us a bit more open minded, a bit more self-accepting, accepting of others, that everybody's different, and valuing of diversity of thought…that is, it sort of gives you a bit of a superpower.

Leading a large and complex museum group during a pandemic and a capital project is a major challenge, not least for anyone in their first CEO role. Not surprisingly, the support of the Board, and external support via peer networks, mentors and coaching has been invaluable. Both Zak and Sara speak highly of the relationship they enjoy with their Chair, who plays a supportive and collaborative role as the third team member. In Zak's words:

> I've often described it is as being like Le Mans, that 24-hour race in France. And there are three drivers, and like those three drivers we swap and share, you're all going to take turns. And one of you might be faster in this bit of the track. One's faster in this part, one of you might be terrible at night-time. And one of you might be waking at night-time. And we try between the three of us to like, jiggle it around, to make it work. And yeah, we do a good job of that.

The other highly developmental and supportive relationship that underpins this model is of course the one between the co-CEOs. They both describe their partnership as a form of on-the-job leadership development, but as Zak explains, it's also an enjoyable way to share the challenge of a senior role:

> I think it's just worth saying that the idea of a job share brings me and Sara joy. It is a difficult job to do and I'm very thankful to have a partner in crime to help me do it. I think it's a really, really good way of leading an organisation. And a job share should be considered seriously, both for the individual and for organisations.

Two years in, co-leadership is working well for BMT and has enabled both Zak and Sara to develop experience they might not otherwise have been able to access. And having access to two diverse and complementary skillsets and approaches is enabling the museum to redevelop and rethink its model and operations more effectively.

Clean Break: making co-leadership work

Clean Break is a women-only theatre company that uses theatre to raise awareness of the damage caused by the criminal justice system. Founded in 1979, it developed a new co-leadership structure in 2018 when its long-serving CEO moved on. The Board decided to appoint three senior roles to share the CEO function: an Executive Director and two Artistic Directors. The rationale for having two ADs was to reflect its 'dual mission' as an arts organisation with a strong social justice focus. As many theatres have long sought to integrate the organisational and artistic aspects of their work through having a joint CEO model comprised of Artistic Director (AD) and Executive Director (ED), Clean Break brought a third chair to the top table, aligning social mission, artistic programme and business model in a structure with 'equal weight'.

All three roles were appointed on a four-day-a-week basis, recognising caring responsibilities, wanting roles to be manageable and "wanting women to be able to succeed and move up in their careers whilst not negating their family lives and responsibilities". The ED, Erin Gavaghan, was recruited externally, and two existing members of the senior leadership team, Róisín McBrinn and Anna Herrmann, moved into the new AD roles as co-leaders. The decision to create a flatter leadership structure also reflected Clean Break's values: "Being a women's organization, we wanted to create alternative models of leadership, and to think about collaboration which has featured really significantly in our evolution." The decision was also informed by the outgoing CEO's experience of the challenges inherent in a solo leadership model in "very precarious and complicated times".

I interviewed Anna Hermann in November 2022, six months after the departure of Róisín to become the AD of the Gate Theatre in Dublin, and as the organisation was reflecting on its future leadership structure. Ultimately Clean Break's experience of co-leadership has been very positive and Anna could not imagine having survived leading the organisation during the last few years of pandemic disruption without Erin and Róisín. However there were also unexpected challenges which led to some tensions with the Board and wider staff team, which took time and effort to resolve. Clean Break's story shows what it takes to establish effective co-leadership and some of the challenges that can arise.

When the new leadership model was initiated in 2018, the three co-leaders were supported by an organisational coach to create a 'compact' setting out clearly their respective roles and responsibilities, but also how they wanted to work together – and importantly, how they wished to handle any disagreements or problems in their relationship. This was a useful process and entailed identifying which decisions needed to be made jointly by all three directors, and where individuals had autonomy. The two ADs went through a similar process with the coach to explore their respective areas of autonomy and shared responsibility, as well as agreeing some protocols around ways of working including a commitment to avoid public disagreements and to discuss concerns only in private.

During the early days of the new model the three co-CEOs invested time in developing their relationships and working closely together. They met regularly to discuss issues and valued these discussions, but relationships with the senior team and Board suffered as the co-leaders were reaching decisions among themselves and collaborating and communicating less with others:

> We had this threesome that met weekly, we threw ideas around, discussed lots of things, and then came to a decision. But we kind of forgot, in that process, that if it was one person leading that would have been a conversation with the senior management team or that might have been with the Chair. And those conversations would have already been involving those beyond that one layer of the organisation. And it took us a while to work out why we were having problematic relationships with our trustees, and with our senior management team.

Working together as three leaders, thrashing out their differences and investing time in working together had come at the expense of wider collaboration. As Anna reflected, they were making decisions but “we weren't bringing anyone along with us”. Once this became apparent the co-CEOs sought external support to improve how they worked with the wider organisation. And after the Chair’s term finished, a decision was made to appoint co-Chairs which worked better in terms of balancing the triple-CEO/ Chair relationship, as well as enabling the organisation to diversify its leadership further and bring lived experience of criminal justice into the co-Chair role.

Part of the challenge of establishing the new co-leadership model stemmed from it taking more time than anticipated for Róisín and Anna to develop their shared leadership approach. They had begun by having differently-titled roles with responsibility for slightly different areas, but their role also involved significant amounts of shared responsibilities. Both ADs had worked alongside one another for four years in other roles. They were keen to work together and committed to a collaborative model. However the difference in their working styles meant at times collaboration didn’t come easily and they did not always agree. This caused uncertainty and confusion for the wider team who sensed disagreement even though the ADs avoided contradicting one another publicly. Staff felt unclear at times about who was leading or making decisions. Both parties invested time in making the relationship work and ultimately it became highly productive, “a really freeing and nourishing, dynamic duo”, with their combined efforts generating a higher quality and level of work than they could have done separately. But developing this level of close collaboration took more time than either had anticipated, and had they both not been so committed to making the model work it might not have succeeded:

> We both really believed in the vision. We really felt that was something we'd been articulating, a participatory artistic voice of the organisation. So we were really committed to the vision. But we hadn't articulated our different ideas of what that vision was until we were there in the role doing it. And then we had to work it out for ourselves, but also make sure that everyone else was hearing a consistent and clear message. So it took time, but we got there. But in the early days, we would come into a space and we'd say things that we haven't checked out with each other first…so that was difficult in the early days. And we got better at being clear. And also our language morphed, we got more singular, we understood more as the as the years developed, we were much clearer with a single voice.

The transition to a dual AD model was not easy for Clean Break, but there were many benefits, not least during the pandemic, when having three senior leaders gave an agility and level of peer-support that enabled them to avoid the high levels of stress that others experienced:

> An absolute benefit was experiencing the pandemic, with three women holding the reins. I can't imagine what that would have felt like otherwise, just in terms of how we shared the pressure and what that meant. The kind of the speed at which we needed to make decisions in those days, and the ability to do it, because there were three of us. The weight of responsibility felt manageable, compared with the burnout which I saw, and continue to see, replicated in other organisations from single CEOs, who were completely exhausted. There were so many times, we were like, ‘I couldn’t imagine doing this without the three of us’.

After Róisín's departure, Clean Break decided to reflect on how best to configure its leadership team in future, conscious that what had worked for the organisation to date was not necessarily the best model going forwards. Also, the organisation is also keen to improve representation of Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people at leadership level, and their current interim arrangement includes the existing AD/ED co-Leaders with a new interim Deputy who has been promoted internally. The Board will consider its options and recruit early in 2023, but Clean Break’s learning is already clear. Co-leadership, including co-artistic leadership, can work well and offers important benefits. The time has passed for the solo CEO, cultural organisations are facing too many challenges for one person and the demands of those roles exclude many who could contribute to more flexible models. But co-

artistic leadership is not necessarily an easy model to introduce, and even when people have previously worked together it takes time and external support to establish successfully. Like many other organisations, rather than assuming that they will replace leadership roles like-for-like, Clean Break are considering carefully what is the best model for their context, and what option would best complement their existing team, when the need to recruit arises.

East London Dance: Opening up opportunities

When East London Dance's (ELD) long-serving Artistic Director and Chief Executive was ready to move on, the Board realised that it needed to carefully consider how they recruited her successor. The CEO role had greatly expanded in scope and complexity over her tenure and the Board realised it would be hard to find the same breadth of experience and skills in another person. Outgoing Chair Moira Sinclair explained that the Board were also aware ELD's leadership needed to better reflect the diversity of East London's communities, and this had become even more pertinent after the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. They realised that might involve re-thinking how they approached the role: "It really did become clear that it was that was likely to require us to change our model and that we couldn't expect all the change to come from the candidates who are applying to us." In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board were also mindful that expectations around work were changing and therefore "we realised if we really wanted to diversify the pool of people we were getting, and reach the best candidates, we might want to think about a more flexible approach".

The Board had already been working with Amanda Parker, then of Inc Arts, on an action plan to diversify the senior leadership team. Amanda now consulted with potential candidates to understand the barriers and incentives to applying for the role. This revealed that the role was perceived by some to be over-ambitious in scope for one person and that greater flexibility would likely yield a wider range of applications. Therefore the recruitment materials welcomed applications for flexible working and two very strong pairs of job-share CEO applicants were shortlisted, including Tia Hassan and Kate Scanlan who were successfully appointed and started the roles in October 2021. Both Kate and Tia wanted to work part-time as they have young families and other creative outlets. They are joint CEOs, each working three days a week. They share responsibility for strategy, whilst each leads distinct areas of the organisation's programmes and activities, and line-manages different staff teams.

Moira explains how the Board had some reservations as to how the proposals for joint leadership would work. The Board were used to working with a full-time solo leader and recognised a co-leadership job-share "might require something different of the Board as well". Some of the Board's concerns were about co-leadership – for example, how responsibilities would be shared – but other questions were about the implications of having part-time post-holders in the senior role:

> Through the process what we were interrogating was how firmly did it feel as though the people who were applying really understood the nature of that kind of co-working relationship? We went to a two-stage interview process because I think we really wanted to interrogate a bit more what that actually looked and felt like in the context of the company. I think some of the anxieties were that it was unmanageable, that things would fall between the stools, that it wouldn't be clear to the team who was doing what.

Moira reflects that there was a greater focus on practical questions than is typical for a leadership selection process. The successful candidates produced a briefing note that outlined how they would work together and manage certain scenarios, e.g. how they would cover holiday periods. As a smaller organisation, the costs of using external Executive Search companies were prohibitive, so the Board led the recruitment process. No-one on the selection committee had direct experience of co-leadership, although the Chair's lived experience meant she was aware how important the option of flexible working can be for working parents, and she had previously managed other job-shares, albeit not at the leadership level. Whilst co-leadership was a new model for ELD, Kate and Tia had a long track record of working together and both had long-standing involvement with the organisation, both of which gave the Board confidence. Most importantly, the combination of their skills and networks (arguably broader than would be found in one person) and their shared vision for ELD convinced the Board that this was the leadership pairing that was right for the organisation:

> They'd worked together for a long time before, so they were coming in with this real sense of 'we know each other, we work well together' – they were convincing in that. And we responded to their shared vision for East London Dance – that's essentially your job, as chair, to recruit the CEO for the organisation, and you want someone who's going to understand and take the vision forward. They both had relationships with East London Dance previously. So they had a sense of the history and values that sit alongside those things. And they were able to articulate that as one, rather than as two different things. So I think they had done a really good job in thinking through those elements of what the job feels like.

Having found the leadership ELD wants for its next phase, the Board recognised they needed to offer more support than might be typical for their co-leaders to flourish, not least as these are also their first CEO roles. Whilst the co-leaders are responsible for developing their own working practices and relationships, the Chair has provided a higher level of advice and support and extended her term of office to enable the new leadership to establish themselves before a new Chair is recruited. ELD's experience shows that taking a more flexible approach to recruitment can yield a more diverse and talented field, and that having a Board that is in good shape, and a Chair who is able and willing to support first-time or co-leaders is critical to making this kind of model possible.

Fun Palaces: Valuing difference

Fun Palaces has a mission to create a world in which everyone has a say in what counts as culture, where it happens, who makes it, and who experiences it. A small central team based in the Albany Theatre in South East London work with a network of Ambassadors across the UK to enable local communities to co-create their own events, culminating in an annual weekend festival. Rooted in co-creation and founded by two co-Directors, Stella Duffy and Sarah-Jane Rawlings, it is perhaps not surprising that when it was time for a change of leadership, a co-leadership model was their preferred choice. What is striking is their deliberate focus of recruiting for difference in their co-leadership model. The two new co-Directors are long-time staff member Kirsty Lothian and Makala Cheung. Makala was appointed following external recruitment to complement Kirsty in terms of skills, experience and perspective.

The recruitment process was carefully considered as Fun Palaces were keen to attract a leader who would be complementary but different to Kirsty who describes herself as "a White, middle-class woman who is Oxford-educated". Makala is British-Chinese and describes her background as working class. Conscious of the importance of finding two people who would work together well, despite bringing very different experiences, skills and styles of working to the table, the recruitment process involved several stages and Kirsty was involved throughout. It was also a very inclusive recruitment process, for example with candidates invited to submit recorded applications if they preferred rather than written statements. But it still took a nudge from a third party associated with Fun Palaces to encourage Makala to apply – although the welcoming recruitment pack helped, as Makala remembers:

> There was a really welcoming line about people from different backgrounds and I remember going 'oh, they want someone just like me', I remember actually thinking that when I read it.

Makala, and the other candidates, were encouraged to have a number of informal conversations with staff and to see the 'interviewing' process as two-way. This reassured Makala, who was able to gather the information she needed to feel clear about what she was potentially committing to.

Reflecting on the difference between recruiting a co-leader to a solo leadership role, Kirsty describes an extra stage to the process where the potential candidates could meet informally and explore how they would work together. As the recruitment happened during the COVID-19 lockdown, this took the form of a long phone conversation, although ideally they would have met face-to-face. In this conversation they discussed some of Makala's concerns about the role, which included the amount of travel involved, and Kirsty was able to adapt to support this, by accompanying Makala on one of her first trips.

Both Kirsty and Makala work part-time, sharing the Director role. Kirsty has a young family; Makala's family is older, but working part-time for Fun Palaces means she can continue her artistic practice, and she also works for a community organisation in Bristol, where she is based. Their working hours fluctuate during the year, with Kirsty working 3-4 days a week during term-time and less in school holidays. Makala works approximately 2 days a week and is able to cover periods when Kirsty works less. Their working patterns are flexible, but they aim to overlap as much as possible – so they are collaborating on projects rather than seeking to cover a Monday-Friday model.

Given the ethos of the organisation, and a wider staff structure with high levels of part-time working and flexibility, appointing co-leaders felt like a natural step, according to Kirsty:

> It's always seemed like the normal way to go about things. We are a part-time organisation. With quite loose job descriptions generally, people adjust around each other and the work gets done. It's a patchwork of teams, of people balancing five different kinds of career and with people balancing caring responsibilities in all ages, or having health reasons that mean there's a certain number of hours that they can do. And it's meant that there's room for

> everyone. And for an organisation that is about recognising everyone's brilliance, it feels really good to be able to enable people's brilliance in that way.

It is a model that also works well for both co-Directors, enabling Kirsty to develop her career part-time whilst balancing parenting responsibilities and enabling Makala to feel able to take on her first national organisational leadership role: "I never would have taken this role if I was the only director. It was knowing that someone else was there...for me it felt okay." Looking around at her peers in other organisations, balancing parenting younger children with working, Kirsty reflects that co-leadership means her own career has progressed whereas "peers have got really stuck hitting at this point in their life". For both Makala and Kirsty in their first CEO roles, having the mutual support of a co-leader is invaluable, particularly given the complex and ambitious scale of their work and the challenging external environment. Kirsty describes the support thus:

> You can be a source of help to each other, which is what feels so kind of rich about it as a model. Like, you've got a buddy. When you don't know what to do about something, it's okay. It's not just your problem when you have a really frustrating situation to deal with. There is somebody who's absolutely invested in it as much as you are. Of course, you can have friendship groups and mentors, coaches, and all the rest of it, which are all brilliant and important, but it's baked into the model of it as well, which is so powerful to me.

Reflecting on how their partnership works, Makala points to their different but complementary ways of working, noting these are things you would not normally consider as part of a job description – whether that is about Makala taking a long-term perspective more often, or Kirsty bringing a more reflective approach alongside Makala's urgency and delivery-focus. They also describe the importance of making time for one another, to understand one another's perspectives and ideas. Having deliberately sought out difference, both parties recognise that they need to prioritise conversations which explore one another's ideas. Being committed to working in this way is essential – Kirsty describes it as being "open to hearing completely opposite points of view and wanting to hear them and wanting to absorb them and wanting to think about them and see how that makes you rethink".

But whilst difference is central to their model of working there is equally an underlying shared vision and values which guide a collaborative way of working that is generative, as Kirsty explains:

> We both have the same underlying ethics. We want to change the world in the same way. We have the same sense of what justice looks like and what the great work looks like, and whilst our guts do not automatically go in the same direction actually we are able between us to have a much fuller way of getting to that change. And that seems to be one of the absolute huge strengths of co-leadership.

At a time when the challenges facing cultural organisations are too complex for any one person to hold all the answers, Fun Palaces have embraced a leadership model that offers them a way to co-create new ways of doing things.

Royal Cornwall Museum: Reflecting a collaborative style of working

Royal Cornwall Museum (RCM) is a small museum based in Truro, home to social history and art collections and employing 11 FTE staff. Like many smaller museums, it was facing major economic challenges when its Trustees sought to recruit a new Director in 2019. At first they failed to appoint through external recruitment. Its story of co-leadership emerges within a period of organisational transformation which began shortly pre COVID-19, but where the additional pressures and disruption of the pandemic led to a reflection about the breadth of leadership skills needed and the reality of how its senior staff were actually working. This example also highlights the relationship between the leadership structure and the wider organisational culture that co-CEOs Jonathan Morton and Bryony Robbins are seeking to embed: one based on collaboration.

The current co-leaders were both interviewed for the CEO role, with Jonathan initially being offered the position and Bryony being invited to consider a slightly different Creative Director role reporting into him. The potential in this partnership was spotted by the Chair who then proposed the arrangement to them both, as Bryony explains:

> I think that she saw there was a match in terms of the skills that we both have. Because part of the part of the interview was talking about the future vision that you have with the organisation, there was a clear link between the way that we were both thinking and she could see the roles working well together. And then she said to me, but obviously, you're going to need to have a think about this. And we ended up having this weird meet-up in the middle of nowhere, it's like the weirdest kind of professional blind date ever.

Jonathan remembers his initial response to the suggestion, and meeting with Bryony, was one of gratitude for the suggested arrangement:

> We clearly got on quite well, in that we had aligned views on what we needed to do so. And I remember feeling very grateful that Bryony wanted to take the job, because it was clear that it was it was never a one-person thing.

So a successful pairing was formed and began working together, with Jonathan starting in March 2020 and Bryony joining a few months later. Initially there was a hierarchy – on paper at least – but the co-leaders worked closely together during the tumult of the pandemic and the equally difficult following year, as Jonathan explains:

> When we joined the organization it was already on the back of quite a lot of change. And, there are a lot of challenges, even if you take out the pandemic, and this organisation was in a fragile, tricky situation. And it made perfect sense that two people led an organisation as we have got different skill sets – we are going to be more use than one. This year as well, because we've entered into a whole new realm of insanity with funding issues and stuff like that, that has really put us into a crisis management mode and the thought of either of us having to do that on our own... Whilst we have a really supportive board and an amazing chair, there's a big difference between being a trustee and being in the hot seat. And with everything that's happened this year, I don't think either of us would have relished that.

Around 18 months into their original roles, Jonathan was prompted to reflect on the mis-alignment in how they were equally sharing responsibility and their status and pay:

> I remember reading something that said that there was still a 17% pay gap between men and women in similar roles. And I did some very quick maths and very quickly established that we'd got exactly that - we'd got a 17% pay gap between me and Bryony. I recognised what Bryony was contributing, and it felt unfair, and it didn't feel right.

So he presented a proposal to the Board to shift the model to a co-CEO role, with Bryony in the role of Artistic Director and Jonathan acting as the Executive Director. Whilst fairness might have motivated the change, there was a clear business case presented including benefits to business

continuity: an increased range of skills, knowledge and experience and capacity to drive transformational change.

The Board paper outlining the proposed arrangements sets out the financial implications and outlines how the proposed arrangement will be managed. Key points include that both posts are line-managed by the Chair with whom they meet jointly each month, and that this model is proposed only for the current situation with the proviso that should either Director leave, the Board would need to review the model again. The paper also outlines the operating principles: each post has distinct areas of responsibility whilst sharing overall leadership responsibility, and "all key organisational decisions will be made jointly". Individual objectives are reviewed three times a year with the Chair, who is also responsible for regular appraisal and CPD discussions with each Director. There is explicit provision for a scenario where the Directors disagree. The Board approved the recommendations and, to date, there has been no need to resort to the clause concerning conflict in decision-making:

> All key decisions will be shared and supported following the ethos of public unity and private challenge. If there is any conflict in decision-making, the concerns will be shared with the Chair and if appropriate conflict resolution will be held. These will form part of the monthly meeting agenda unless time critical.

Crucially, the shared leadership model is also presented as aligned with the wider cultural shift the co-leaders sought to affect which "encourages shared responsibility for the values, vision, objectives and priorities". Bryony and Jonathan joined RMC with a brief to lead transformation of the museum. A core aspect of this has been to develop a highly collaborative ethos among their small staff team where colleagues share a vision and contribute across the traditional boundaries of museum activity:

> The organization had a history of silo working, of teams not working well together, and so, we looked at putting together a smaller team, where people would have greater responsibility across the board. In museums it's a common problem for people get so siloed, so specialist in their areas that they just sit over there and don't see or don't feel like they're contributing to the overall success and everything that the organisation does. And we don't have the luxury of that anyway, because we've got such a small team, but we don't want to do it like that, because we want work collectively together. And, then we're all responsible in the end for the success.

This collaborative culture is reflected on how they work as co-leaders, but it's also enabled significant organisational change:

> It's not about having someone to bounce ideas off. It's actually it's much more subtle, a refining process, because it's not just ideas and shaping them, it's actually having somebody who's scrutinising it at a senior level. And this organisation has changed radically in the time we've been here. And that would have been a lot harder if there was only one person in post. But because there's two of us there is more momentum. And there's more persuasion. There's more opportunity for collaborating with different people. I think it has really pushed things along at a pace.

The co-leadership model at RCM appears to be working well for the organisation, as well as for the individual leaders. But Jonathan and Bryony caution it's not a model that would suit everyone; critically, you need to want to work collaboratively and share responsibility:

> It's not an automated process, you can't just create on paper two job descriptions that complement each other with this set of skills over here and a set of skills over here… And it's not the same ethos for a lot of people. When you see the way that leaders are developed… there are certain attitudes and outlooks that come with CEO roles and that level of responsibility and one of them isn't always around wanting to share and wanting to work collaboratively with another.

Pickford Group Schools

'What got us here, won't get us there': new times require new models

The education sector is experiencing many of the same challenges as cultural organisations: threats to financial viability, disruption from COVID, a rapid pace of organisational change, high levels of external scrutiny and pressures on the workforce. I interviewed the Chair of governors of a group of small specialist schools which first deployed shared leadership as an interim solution to cover a temporary leadership vacancy. However they quickly discovered its benefits and now see co-leadership as a highly advantageous arrangement for their organisation, as well as a more inclusive option for their workforce. It's also a story that highlights the importance of governing bodies sharing leadership responsibilities with senior staff and being willing to find inventive and inclusive solutions to support those in leadership roles. The name of the school group and some minor details have been changed to protect the identity of individuals involved, but the key facts are unchanged.

The Pickford Group was formed from a small group of specialist schools to share costs when funding levels threatened their economic viability, and the breadth of curriculum that could be offered by the individual schools. Initially the school appointed one of the original head teachers from its member schools to lead across the group as an Executive Headteacher but this role proved to be quite different in scope from a traditional head teacher role and very challenging, and consequently the post-holder resigned, leaving a vacancy that could not be filled quickly.

Schools, like cultural organisations, are operating in a context of rapid change and leadership roles are highly demanding:

> The survival of these specialist schools was, at one point, in jeopardy. So we've always had to take risks, and I've always been the one pushing to take more risks, to prevent the thing we're all afraid of. Whereas other people tend to say if we carry on and we just do it, we just take it steady, we'll be all right. And I could always see further ahead that we couldn't let things go on, if we didn't take these risks it would be the end of this this organisation. In a world where we had one school, one head teacher worked, but now we've got a group. The world is more complex. It has changed and is continuing to change. And I think if as governors or trustees or whoever, we don't respond to that with our structures, our staffing our attitudes, we run the risk of organisations just falling apart at the seams, because it isn't the same world as it was even five years ago, never mind ten or fifteen years ago.

Faced with interim senior leadership vacancy, Pickford Group were supported by their Local Authority to appoint two experienced head teachers on a part-time basis to 'care take' the role whilst formal external recruitment for the permanent head teacher could take place. A highly qualified new head teacher was then appointed on a full-time basis, but during their notice period their personal circumstances changed. They approached the Chair to explore the possibility of taking up the role part-time, to which the Chair agreed because they felt strongly this was the best person for the role and wanted to retain them. The Chair explains:

> I would love to take credit for the shared leadership model, but in a sense it was accidental. Because we wanted them so we said yes. The Local Authority were very nervous about it. They didn't want a shared model, they thought it made us vulnerable…but because we wanted this particular person we said 'No, we're going ahead with it'.

Having already experienced co-leadership courtesy of their interim arrangements gave the Chair confidence it could work. Importantly, they were also able to retain one of their original interim leaders to work alongside their new permanent appointment.

Conscious the role had proved too demanding for one person in the past, Pickford Group also realised a job-share might be a more sustainable arrangement:

> It is a very difficult job for one person. It's a very lonely job…and I actually thought it could prove to be a good thing, which indeed it did. So they did that role all through COVID. And I honestly think if we hadn't shared the job during COVID I don't know what would have happened, because the pressure and the stress on senior leaders at that time was huge.

More recently, after both post-holders eventually decided to move on, Pickford Group were again recruiting for their senior role. This time they approached recruitment differently:

> So we advertised again. And we put quite clearly that the post was available as a full-time role, or it was open to job-share. Again, we had a strong field of applicants, but only one really stood out and they were working part-time and said they would only really be interested in the post if it was on that part-time basis. And again, they were streets ahead of the others, and we wanted them. None of the other candidates were suitable to job-share so we decided to appoint them, and then deal with the partner question later, which I think was, looking back, probably a fairly brave decision…but we just felt that they had so many skills and talents and so much energy and stuff we needed that we couldn't afford to miss out on that.

The governors took it upon themselves to find a complementary job-share partner working alongside their preferred candidate from the external recruitment. This amounted to a 1.1FTE job-share, to allow some overlap. Ideally, they would have preferred a whole extra day for this, but budget constraints allow only for 0.5 days. A partner was found, and the new co-leadership arrangement is working well. The resulting combination of two part-time leaders offers great value for money, even though there is a 10% cost increase due to resourcing the extra 0.1FTE. These two individuals bring different skills sets, perspectives and a broader range of experience than is possible in one person. The Chair also notes that the co-leaders mentor one another: "It's very good for their own professional development because they've each sort of got a mentor, if you like, an in-house mentor in one another."

There was, however, some resistance from funders and some governors initially, who perceived co-leadership as inherently risky:

> A number of our governors would have preferred a full-time appointment. There was a feeling that we should do what we've always done, because that's what everybody does, and an unwillingness to take a risk. I think experience has shown that the opposite is true, that it is a greater risk to take on one person to perform a complex role than it is to take on two, because you have that shared stress load, if you like, apart from anything else. And if that is a model of working that works for them, and it's what they want, I think it's by far the strongest leadership model.

Pickford Group arrived at co-leadership out of necessity when then discovered the increasingly complex and demanding role of Head Teacher was 'too big a role' for one person. Their organisation was facing significant threats and challenges and had to think differently about the leadership it needed, and remove any barriers to reaching the widest talent pool when recruiting. As the Chair explained:

> Given our situation with the challenges facing specialist schools, I think we've had to be imaginative and think outside the box…and I think in doing so this has actually let in [to leadership positions] people who would otherwise be excluded. Leaders and managers have an absolute responsibility now for the health and wellbeing of their staff, but also the health and wellbeing of their organisation, to be flexible, to be understanding and supportive, because that way you get the best out of your staff and the best possible outcome for your organisation.

Pickford Group's Chair is a highly experienced organisational leader and is now retired and so able to draw on their own leadership experience but also able to offer significant support in their capacity as Chair.

Their leadership of the governing body has been critical in persuading others to experiment with new models, and in practically supporting those appointed. The Chair recognises it's a significant time commitment to work in this way. It also requires a leadership style which rather than seeing the governing body's role as monitoring risk and checking on how things are done instead facilitates and supports its executive:

> I think the difficulty is being supportive and hands-on enough to make them feel supported, but also giving them the freedom and the trust to just get on and do the job. So my style of governance is we have lots and lots of phone calls, emails, chats, informal chats, rather than formal meetings. I think that style of governance of informal support is worth far more than, you know, going in with a clipboard and doing your formal monitoring…we do some of that monitoring but it's a much more sort of supportive role…I do have to be more involved than I would normally be.

Their advice to other Boards? Simply put: "always go for the best candidate, or candidates. And be imaginative, and prepared to take risks to make it work".

Creative Black Country: Co-leading for community engagement

Creative Black Country (CBC) began life in late 2014 and is part of the Arts Council England-funded Creative People and Places (CPP) programme which aims to engage audiences in areas where evidence shows people are less likely to take part in publicly-funded arts and culture. Reporting to a consortium of voluntary and cultural sector partners, and working across a large geographical area including Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, CBC develops new creative projects with local people in the places where they live.

I interviewed Sajida Carr CBC's Director of Operations and Development, who along with Parminder Dosanjh (Creative Director) is one of CBC's co-Directors, to discover more about how their co-leadership model emerged and how it works. CBC is a story where co-leadership emerged as a practical solution to a challenge, rather than being the original choice of leadership structure. It is also an example of how co-leadership can be successful even when the co-leaders do not already know one another.

Within CPP most of the programmes are led by a single Director and this is the model CBC's consortium initially advertised when it needed to replace its first Programme Director in 2014. Sajida remembers there being a three-stage selection process, during which the Consortium considered the needs of the programme and decided to recruit an additional Artistic Director. They changed the leadership structure and decided they wanted to share responsibility across an Artistic Director and an organisational lead role they initially referred to as a Programme Director. Having initially applied as Creative Director Sajida's response was one of relief, and in hindsight she's very grateful this was suggested, as to cover everything in the job description would have been a stretch and the Programme Director role suited her skillset better. Her only reservation at the time was whether she would be able to work with the person appointed as Artistic Director, as they did not know one another:

> The only part that worried me was - who is the Creative Director going to be? But actually it turned out to be a really good fit as I like to talk things through and have someone to sound ideas off with.

Fortunately the two co-leaders were able to forged a successful partnership. Sajida even feels it is beneficial not having known one another before in case others perceived this as nepotism. Having a 'clean slate' for their working relationship also sets a good example in terms of the collaborative ethos that underpins CPP and CBC's mission as well as its style of working internally. Sajida concludes the values-focused approach of CBC was helpful as it attracts staff with shared values, and these values align well with the collaborative ethos and leadership style that is central to co-leadership. Other factors Sajida considers contributed to the likelihood of a successful partnership include that they were both at a similar stage in their careers and ready to step into an executive role. They have different styles, with Sajida preferring a more structured and planned approach and Parminder working more responsively, but they have realised that combining these approaches produces better results:

> What I find is that working with someone with a different approach is always beneficial. It can seem easier to work with people who are like you, but I don't think that's right. We both work differently, which is a much healthier challenge. Where we can be very honest with each other, share feedback and reflect between us why something didn't work out. Underneath all of this though is a level of trust built over time. There is quite a bit of give-and-take in the way we work. And in the early days that meant things could be slow at times, but we've got a lot quicker over time. And this has enabled me to work differently with the wider team too.

Initially Parminder was appointed three days a week, with Sajida working full-time although as they evolved their co-leadership model both posts became full-time. At the outset Sajida was called

Programme Director and Parminder Artistic Director, but this confused people, so whilst Sajida and Parminder are equal co-Directors, they now use the terms Creative Director (Parminder) and Director of Operations and Development (Sajida) that describe their areas of responsibility more clearly.

Over time they have adjusted how responsibility is best shared between them and the wider staff team. At times external partners expect both to attend meetings, as if each only has 50% authority, but Parminder and Sajida are clear each is fully authorised to act as the executive leader and they avoid 'doubling-up' as this would be inefficient. There are times, however, when having two different individuals available is helpful: for example when needing to build external relationships, one might connect better with a key partner than the other. Perhaps one of the key factors that has enabled their co-leadership model to be adopted is the flexibility CBC has in terms of its wider staffing model. Where relevant, freelancers and staff attend meetings on behalf the directors as at this enables the team to manage their capacity better. Compared with other CPP programmes with a single leader, CBC also focuses on working with Creative Associates instead of employed Creative Producers. This has the added benefit of creating employment for a wider pool of locally-based practitioners, which is in line with CBC's ethos of working and investing in people who live locally.

The benefits of sharing a leadership role are evident. Sajida and Parminder have complementary skillsets, with Sajida focussing on finance and compliance, for example. Having a very large geographical remit, and lots of external partners, means that having two leaders available to build relationships or represent the organisation externally is also valuable. But as well as sharing responsibilities, they also collaborate frequently on areas such as business planning and programming. That, for Sajida, is the real benefit of the model: the shared space to collaborate on ideas:

> When we're in the office it seems like we hardly get anything done because we're catching up, but you need to invest time to make this model work. Otherwise it's just a job-share. We bounce ideas off each other.

CBC has found co-leadership suits its work, its ethos and that leaders who have shared values around how they like to work can work together well, even if they did not know one another before.

Rising Arts: Co-leadership as political and practical

Rising Arts Agency is a youth-led creative arts agency based in Bristol, founded in 2016 as a Community Interest Company. Rising's co-leadership model emerged out of discussion around the transition from the founder Director, Kamina Walton, to new leadership. As a youth-led organisation, with a highly collaborative culture, it had always been Rising's ambition that leadership would be handed over to younger leaders within five years. Conversations about the transition started 18 months before the handover happened in September 2021, with two existing staff – Euella Jackson, who was the Engagement Producer Manager, and Jess Bunyan, then Development Manager – being identified as potential candidates. At the time, Euella was 24 years old and she felt co-leadership was a less daunting prospect that the traditional solo-leader model:

> It felt like a big ask as I didn't have experience of leading an organisation…there's something there about confidence when working with someone else.

But as well as being a practical choice, particularly for those new to organisational leadership or wanting to work flexibly around other commitments, co-leadership is a political choice, reflecting Rising's values, as Euella explained in a blog post:

> Co-direction is a direct challenge to traditional, and often masculine, ideas of leadership – this idea that leadership comes from one person, one dictator. Leadership, to us, is a community effort – it's bigger than an individual. It's the sharing of power, resources, responsibility and accountability. That's what Jess and I are here to model. (Rising Arts Agency, 2021).

Jess values equally the symbolic potential of co-leadership and its practical advantages and explains how the model matches their wider ethos as an agency:

> It's a clear challenge to traditional hierarchies and acknowledges the different dimensions needed in good leadership. People often think of leadership as lonely but it doesn't have to be! The idea that we can co-lead, co-direct and collaborate on everything reflects exactly how we already work day-to-day, where everyone in the team at Rising takes more or less of a lead depending on the project and their own interests and skills. We are a collective and this allows us to bring our full selves to work when we can and rest when we need to. (Rising Arts Agency, 2021).

Both were keen to share the responsibility with one another and hence the co-leadership model emerged as their preferred option. Coincidentally, during their transition period another key role in the organisation leading the *Be It* programme was recruited on a job-share basis which provided a valuable learning opportunity for understanding how co-leadership could work.

Co-leadership is clearly aligned with Rising Arts Agency's mission to empower young people and its organisational culture which is highly collaborative. A move to co-leadership feels like a necessary and helpful step in creating a less hierarchical organisation:

> When there's one director you can be collaborative but ultimately if you are the director then you are the one that people look to. And I think it's a step in the right direction in terms of being non-hierarchical and collaborative, when you do at least have two people in that role.

And whilst co-leadership feels like the best model for Rising Arts Agency, Euella and Jess have been thinking carefully about how they avoid pooling power at the 'top' between co-leaders:

> I think that one thing that I kind of struggled with it at first was this idea of, how if you're going from a flat hierarchical structure with one director, how do you then effectively share power between two co-directors and also with the team as well, so that they still feel like they've got agency? How does everyone feel empowered, they want to feel like they've still

> got a sense of agency over what's happening here, when Jess and I are trying to take up more power than we've had before.

This concern for ensuring power is shared, and not hoarded by those in leadership positions, has led to all staff undergoing coaching skills training and enabling informal conversations between board members and staff. There are also quarterly team Action Learning sets in which anyone can raise anything with everyone being in the room. There is also a strong focus on accountability with the co-leaders holding one another to account, but also inviting staff to challenge them and enabling staff to speak directly to the Board as well so there is accountability.

Whilst co-leadership was a clear choice for Euella and Jess, it was less clear how to make it work. Their first challenge, during the transition year, was to figure out how to structure their shared role. Having identified the key responsibilities held by the outgoing Director, they considered how these might be split between them. They retained lead responsibility in their previous areas of expertise and have gradually evolved the wider staffing model to bring in greater management support and project delivery capacity which enables them to focus more on strategy and visioning. However they have resisted dividing up many of the responsibilities other co-leaders delineate, such as line-management, to be able to respond to business needs as they arise and to maximise opportunities to collaborate together. A year into their co-leadership their roles are still emerging:

> We couldn't find many successful examples. There was the model of a creative director and an executive director, which didn't feel like a good fit for us, in terms of not just our interests or how we work, but also in terms of the way the agency is set up. So over the past year we have taken time together to really vision what we want from the agency, what structures we need, what team members we need in place, and then being able to model the type of co-directors we need to be in order for that to happen.

Collaborating closely, rather than seeking to separate responsibilities too far has been developmental for both, with Euella able to learn about the financial and commercial aspects and Jess discovering new skills around facilitation. Both work a four-day week, which enables them both to pursue outside interests, which they feel is beneficial to their roles at Rising Arts Agency, as well as for their own wellbeing and development.

Jess and Euella are committed to a fixed-term as co-leaders and in five years' time aim to have transitioned again to new leaders, a model which Euella is finding helpful in shaping their approach:

> We see ourselves as having a tenure and that means we have a goal in terms of what we want to be able to hand over. It's really nice to be able to think about leadership in that way, like you're holding the baton, and you're passing it on. You want to be able to hand over something really tangible and you don't want to leave it the same way it was. Hopefully, you want to leave it better than you found it. So the way we're thinking about our roles is to ensure that we can kind of facilitate this bigger vision for the agency.

Rising Arts Agency is an organisation where the mission and culture clearly link with the leadership structure they have chosen. And there are practical advantages too, in terms of the flexibility and support co-leadership offers younger and first-time leaders. It is also an example that highlights the change involved with introducing a new leadership model. Whilst Jess and Euella did not have all the answers and the start, and the model continues to evolve, it's clear the model works well. Rising Arts Agency's experience suggests leaders don't need all the answers before making a start, as Euella's advice to others considering this model confirms:

> I want to quote the title of an album by Sinead Harnett that I've been banging recently: 'Ready is always too late'. If you wait until you're 'ready' to start something like this, then the moment has already passed.

Diverse City: A win-win situation

Given Diverse City's mission is to create "equality in every artistic arena: the boardroom, the audience, backstage and centre stage" it might not be surprising that it operates a co-leadership model: with two Artistic Directors, a Finance Director and Executive Director forming an equal four-way senior team. The company creates and tours new theatre and circus performances, and actively nurtures new creative voices. All its shows are audio-described and BSL-interpreted with rehearsals and auditions also being inclusive to ensure "art can be made by any body, for every body".

Jamie Beddard and Claire Hodgson have worked together informally for many years before formalising their current arrangement as joint ADs in 2018. Claire founded the company and Jamie had worked for Diverse City in a freelance capacity previously. Both currently work full-time, with Claire working flexibly around school hours, and she is supported in this by having a partner who works part-time to enable Claire to travel when work tours. Most of the wider staff team is fractional and flexible: the 17 posts equate to only 9FTE roles, and Diverse City employs a wider freelance pool of around 175 people. The company has been working remotely since 2009, long before the COVID-19 pandemic. The whole company avoids unnecessary hierarchies having only an SMT and other roles and a relatively small gap between highest and lowest paid members of staff.

In terms of how they work together as joint ADs, both are part of the senior leadership team. They also both also lead and sometimes perform in artistic projects: Jamie writes and directs, Claire directs. They each lead different projects, but support one another as required. Having known one another for 30 years as friends as well as artists, and having worked together in different capacities via Diverse City for another 17 years, they knew each other well before deciding to work together. At times that means the interactions can feel more personal, more emotionally-charged, although they also have clear boundaries around work which include avoiding contact at weekends and in the evenings, except in an emergency. Knowing one another's strengths and weaknesses and being able to act as critical friends helps get the best from one another.

Claire feels the main benefit of shared leadership has been that it's improved the quality and range of what Diverse City does. As Founder, Claire reflects on the difference sharing leadership has made to the company:

> As soon as I began to share the leadership, the company became far more successful. I know that if I run something on my own, it will just mirror my worst traits – I'm pretty clear about that. So the point is, to get people who are not like you… As soon as sharing leadership happened in the company, the work has been better and we've made better decisions.

The turning point came for Claire when she became a parent and recognised that the company needed the resilience that shared leadership offered. Jamie is a working parent too and over the past five years the senior team have been able to support one another through other caring for older relatives, and in periods of bereavement. The benefits of a shared leadership model came into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic:

> We went through a very intense period, and we even thought that the company might end. We had 17 people on payroll, and 175 freelancers, and most of them were relying on us for work. The four of us dealt with it really well. And mainly, everyone in the team was able to furlough or not as they chose, and we just morphed. We didn't work long hours, we had to work very short hours during the pandemic, as short as possible, mainly because we were home-schooling kids as well. But that worked well for us in that we worked every day, so we were always connected every day.

Reflecting on his more recent shift into a leadership position, Jamie reflects that sharing leadership responsibility is less onerous and he would have not wished to undertake an AD role single-handedly. Both of them describe how the overwhelming anxiety that can accompany creating work and artistic leadership is mitigated by the support they offer one another:

> I always feel sick about making a new show. And then I think it's okay, Jamie will be in the room as well. And all the artists will be there; it's a collaboration, everyone's helping. I'm not alone. Because I would find that overwhelming.

Both highlight the pressure that comes with a leadership role is not something they would want to shoulder alone. The heroic model of leadership is not something that feels desirable or possible:

> We know from our experience of it that solo leadership is not a great structure for women, for anyone who's got any sort of chronic condition, for many disabled people - it excludes them.

Also for both Claire and Jamie, being joint ADs means they can continue to purpose other artistic projects outside of Diverse City which is beneficial for their own development and wellbeing, but also means Diverse City gains from them having a chance to explore creative ideas that are outside the scope of their core work. For Jamie this includes acting roles and the flexibility of their shared leadership model means that it's possible for them to reduce their hours temporarily to accommodate external projects, particularly as there are also two non-artistic directors as part of the leadership team. So whilst Jamie currently works a five-day week, as he's been involved in making and touring new work, he is likely to reduce this back to a three- or four-day week again.

For Diverse City, co-leadership has worked well in terms of creating greater organisational stability and enabling its two Artistic Directors to balance their wider creative and family lives with organisational leadership responsibilities. It's a model that works equally well for the leaders as individuals and offers the company significant benefit, as Claire concludes:

> I'm pretty clear that I wouldn't be able to run the company without Jamie, and also I think the company's been successful because of co-leadership.

Royal Shakespeare Company: Leading change as co-leaders

In late 2021, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) advertised for two Leadership Associates with the dual aim of supporting the organisation to re-think its strategy and tackling under-representation in its senior leadership team. This case study highlights the potential of co-leadership, particularly when it enables a leadership team to broaden its lived-experience, in terms of enabling organisational change.

The recruitment materials described the roles as being tasked with leading a major internal and external consultation "to help us answer profound questions about the future of our organisation and our sector, in order to set out a new vision and strategy for the RSC". In the candidate pack the person specification was broadly defined to attract the widest possible range of candidates and in recognition that:

> Arts leaders are formed in a wide variety of settings, at different times in their lives and from different starting points. We want to hear from anyone who believes they can make a fresh contribution to our thinking and our actions at this time.

There was a declared intention to "commit to permanent changes in our decision-making structures from 2023" informed by the work of these Leadership Associates. The roles were cast broadly, enabling them to be tailored to the skills, experience and context of the successful candidates and how these might relate to organisational priorities. Employment terms were flexible, again to attract the broadest range of candidates, and included part-time working, self-employment or secondment. The fee offered was £35K, equivalent of £70K pro rata, in line with RSC senior leadership salaries.

The two successful candidates, Justine Themen and Sandeep Mahal, started their roles in January 2022, both working 2.5 days a week initially, although this was later increased to four days a week. Justine is a theatre director and Sandy's expertise is in literature, including libraries and publishing. Neither knew one another before starting work at the RSC. Justine reports to the Acting Artistic Director (AD) and Sandy reports to the Executive Director (ED), reflecting their respective areas of responsibility. There had been an assumption the two posts would work together closely at times, including leading the consultation together, and their compatibility and complementarity was considered during the selection process.

From the outset, the Leadership Associates consciously sought to align their working days to facilitate collaboration and maximise their co-leadership potential by ensuring regular dialogue and four-way meetings between the ED, AD and themselves. They formally shared responsibility for a major initiative that was the main focus of the first six months in role, and they each led on different projects according to their expertise, capacity and in response to emerging organisational needs. For example Justine has led work around the RSC's relationship with freelance artists and creating an inclusive rehearsal room culture. Sandy has led the creation of a new Equity, Diversity, Justice and Inclusion Strategy, with clear action plans at team-level across the organisation. Both are witnessing a significant shift in progress and confidence in the embedding of inclusive practices.

Despite not knowing one another, the decision to collaborate closely emerged quickly and their brief to co-deliver a major strategic consultation meant they needed to be able to work together well, at pace. They were both inclined towards co-leadership. Sandeep had advocated for and wanted to introduce a co-leadership structure in her previous role, as Director of Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature whereas Justine, as a theatre professional, had experience of the AD/ED model in the past, including as co-AD of the Belgrade Theatre, and also held a strong belief in collaboration:

> I directed a Suffragette play when I was at university and at the end, the last line was 'we can do so much more if we do it together'. And I just feel that in every bone in my body, really. So the idea that there were going to be two of us making a difference was important. And also not being that lone voice: I'd been a lone voice, the person championing diversity in

> an organization before. So there was also just a complete joy, in not being that lone voice anymore.

As Justine's comments make clear, co-leadership appealed as model in their particular context as leaders of change around diversity. Whilst they found their colleagues at the RSC to be very supportive and committed to change, at times some of the work was very challenging and as women of colour in a very White organisation, they were very aware of being in a minority or to use Gaylene Gould's term the 'Only Ones'. Justine and Sandeep value how co-leadership has meant they could provide moral and practical support, at times enabling them to flex workload when one of them was unwell. It has also emboldened them to continue to challenge when this has felt tiring. Co-leadership, in this context of change, means there are two different voices: in effect it is a form of pluralism which encourages others to speak out, enabling a wider range of perspectives and ideas to feel comfortable expressing themselves. As Justine explains:

> Having two of us also enables other people to hear difficult messages, because we're not saying exactly the same thing. One of us will speak and the other will complement them, coming in from a lateral angle. So I think that also enables people to hear what we're saying and to go with it. And that plurality of voices means they can add their voices to that also; that it becomes more of a chorus. There's not a right or wrong. We're walking a similar path, Sandy and I, but we do add different perspectives to what each other says.

Again this raises the core tenet at the heart of what enables co-leadership relationships to work well: shared values and vision, but different skills, approaches and perspectives. Their shared values, of being non-hierarchical and having commitment to collaboration and co-creation, as well as both being women of colour, enabled trust to be built quickly between them – which was important, given the complexity and sensitivity of the work they were leading. Sandeep credits the design of the opportunity as enabling this collaboration, as well as the expertise of Erica Whyman and Catherine Mallyon (the AD and ED), both highly experienced co-leaders in their own right, in selecting such a complementary pair. She described how the framing of the brief for the Leadership Associates implies certain values and ways of working:

> The candidate pack invited us to respond to the question 'what kind of change do you think the RSC is uniquely placed to make in the world?' And I think there was in that invitation a sense of the RSC wants to change and that there is something of value we could bring in our lived experiences and our own vision of what it could be.

The complementarity of Sandeep and Justine's experience and responsibilities has been important too. In common with many large and complex arts organisations with competing demands, the RSC can find it hard to integrate its thinking. Justine describes a tendency for cultural organisations to create unhelpful and unnecessary binaries of artistic/operational, freelance/permanent, mainstage/ outreach, whereas as co-leaders they've been able to work across the organisation and integrate better. Even though on the surface their responsibilities may appear quite separate, they regularly contribute to one another's thinking, acting as one another's sounding board. This leads to creative thinking, with richer and new ideas arising from their different perspectives and experiences.

Through embracing co-leadership, in less than twelve months, the RSC Leadership Associates have enabled a cultural change at the RSC of a depth and pace that has exceeded the expectations of their senior leadership colleagues. This has been challenging work, but the inherent peer support in the co-leadership model as well as the plurality of voices it enables, has been critical to its success.

Appendix III: list of interviewees

Individual leaders	**Organisation**
Sara Wajid & Zak Mensah	Birmingham Museum Trust
Makala Cheung & Kirsty Lothian	Fun Palaces
Bryony Robins & Jonathan Morton	Royal Cornwall Museum
Sajida Carr	Creative Black Country
Keisha Thompson	Contact Theatre
Anon 1	Former Co-CEO
Jennifer Jones & Mark Macleod	Andrew Carnegie Birthplace Museum
Jess Bunyan & Euella Jackson	Rising Arts Agency
Mike Mckenzie & Mark Nesbitt	TuFC
Anna Herrmann	Clean Break Theatre
Jamie Beddard & Claire Hodgson	Diverse City
Sandeep Mahal MBE & Justine Themen	Royal Shakespeare Company

Sector specialists	**Specialism/ Role**
Amanda Parker	Leadership and diversity
Dawn Langley	Leadership and disability
Matthew Swann	Achates Executive Search
Ed Bampfylde & Rosanna Cundall	Saxton Bampfylde Executive Search
Sue Hoyle OBE	Leadership
Amanda Smethurst	Formerly Liz Amos Executive Search
Mark Robinson	Leadership
Ciara Eastell OBE	Leadership
Dawn Cameron	Leadership and diversity
Clare Thurman	Leadership
Caroline Collier OBE	Leadership
Gaylene Gould	Leadership and diversity
Sarah Davies	Leadership and diversity
Pippa Warin	Leadership and governance
Sandeep Mahal MBE	Leadership and diversity

Trustees	**Role, Organisation**
Moira Sinclair OBE	Chair, East London Dance
Anon 2	Chair
Anon 3	Trustee
Anon 4	Trustee
Anon 4	Chair, Schools Group
Niels de Vos	Chair, Birmingham Museum Trust

Appendix IV: Survey respondent and interviewee breakdown

Sector-specialists (15 individuals)
87% female, 7% disabled and 27% Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse.

Leaders with experience of co-leadership (20 individuals)
65% female, 10% disabled and 50% Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse.

Workforce survey (94 respondents)
83 people answered one or more of the equalities questions at the end. The survey typically reached people of working age, between the ages of 26 and 65, with the majority being aged between 26 and 55. Respondents' employment status fell mainly into the categories of Full-time employment (53 people), Part time employment (18 people) or Freelance (26 people). 20 people identified with an ethnic group other than the "White" categories listed in the survey and 11 people ticked "Any other White background". In total, of those respondents that indicated an ethnic background 31 people ticked a "Black", "Asian", "Arab", or "Any other White background". An equal number of people identified as disabled with 39 people ticking "Yes" and 39 ticking "No" and five people preferring not to say. 16 people had caring responsibilities, "unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support."

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End Notes

[1] Marvin Bower cited in Feigen et al., 2022, no page numbers.

[2] First recorded Executive Director of National Theatre was David Aukin in 1986 (National Theatre, 2023).

[3] The report on *Social Mobility in the Cultural Economy* from the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre cites evidence of inequality and exclusion in the creative industries in the UK, which has been created through class, gender, race, disabilities, skills and place. It recommends accelerating progression of diverse talent and promoting inclusive leadership, to ensure that the creative leaders of the future are much more diverse (Carey et al., 2021).

[4] 'Women, racially minoritised people, those with a working-class background, people with a disability, and those living outside of London and the South East, are all significantly underrepresented in the creative and cultural industries, particularly in senior decision-making roles and key creative professions […].' (Wreyford et al., 2021, p.35)

[5] 'Women are over-represented in support roles, but under-represented in creative areas such as artistic director, writer or producer.' (Brook et al., 2020, p.224).

[6] '11% of NPOs reported having a Chief Executive who was Black, Asian, or Ethnically Diverse, with 12% of Artistic Directors and 11% of Chairs. Disabled people make up 11% of Chief Executives, 8% of Artistic Directors and only 6% of Chairs. […] Women make up 66% of Chief Executives, compared to 42% of Artistic Directors and Chairs.' (Arts Council England, 2021).

[7] In addition to non-sector specific support, for example to furlough staff, various cultural recovery funding funds have been available in Scotland, Wales and England to cultural and heritage sectors.

[8] 'The UK's cultural sector is undoubtedly at an inflection point and facing imminent burnout alongside significant skills and workforce gaps.' (Walmsley et al., 2021, p.68).

[9] Eric Lockley, a performer, writer and producer at the Movement Theatre Company presents co-leadership as an alternative to exclusionary leadership: 'Our structure as a team, as a collaborative leadership, is that no one person has the answer. And I think that this can be a novel idea when combating White supremacy and patriarchy. It's like not one person has all the answers and is obligated to have all the answers – they aren't the special one or the exceptional one.' (Alick, 2020, p.18).

[10] 'Co-leadership [also] allows CFS [Catholic Family Service] to model the type of collaboration it wants to see internally whilst demonstrating an alternative type of power structure. "The collaborative aspect of co-leadership breaks down the more traditional colonial patriarchal type of decision-making," says Williams. "Since we aspire to be a sector leader in collaboration, co-leadership gives us an opportunity to model that strategy within our own organisation.' (Chary, 2022, no page numbers).

[11] '83% of respondents to our survey identified as female. […] So why is this figure higher than the Arts Council England NPO museum workforce data? The qualitative feedback collected elsewhere in our survey indicates that it could be attributed to the flexibility that freelancing can provide for people with caring responsibilities; the incompatibility of some employed positions with caring responsibilities, forcing women out of such positions; and the limited career progression opportunities for senior women in the sector.' (Museum Freelance, 2020, p.16).

[12] 'More broadly, reflecting on my conversations it feels clear to me that CPP places have often exemplified innovative, high-quality practice in respect of engaging and collaborating with communities. I wonder whether they might also want to be recognised as exemplifying excellent employment practices. If that is the case, consideration should be given to addressing issues such as

employment tenure, contracts, expected working hours and pay because ultimately, these end up being issues of diversity and fairness. If you want a diverse workforce, many among that workforce will be people who seek reasonably secure, fairly paid work which enables them to progress and make plans for the future.' (Cameron, 2021, p.42).

[13] 'But then you've got to fight to get the support or make them know what is required. And it can be so exhausting, because the infrastructure is not there within the organisation to be able to make someone feel like they belong. So, it's like you're basically on your own. And then when I told my manager about access, support, she didn't know about Access to Work. She didn't know anything.' (Armstrong Cameron, 2022, p.14).

[14] 'Black, Asian and ethnically diverse people are not making significant inroads into senior leadership positions and when they do, they rarely stay.' (Gould, 2020).

[15] 'Clearly the anticipation of the problems of combining parenting and the creative industries casts a long, anticipatory shadow for young women entering cultural occupations. Notably, no men discussed parenting in relation to creative careers unless they were already parents.' (Brook et al., 2020, p.230).

[16] 'Of further concern is that women leaders faced with the long working hours culture, job uncertainty and an entrenched male leadership community of practice seem to be making a conscious decision not to apply for more senior leadership roles thus further reducing the pipeline of female leaders,' (Watton et al., 2019, p.2).

[17] 'These respondents, who are in the most influential positions in the cultural sector, believe most strongly in the meritocracy account. They are also most sceptical of the impact of social factors. Such as gender, class, or ethnicity, on explanations for success in the sector.' (Brook et al., 2020, p.72).

[18] 'The ongoing "balancing act" (Lampel et al., 2000, p. 265) that co-leaders perform influences how creation, programming, and organizational risks are managed. For instance, artistic ambitions can push production beyond predicted budget and time resources. Audience response to new work and programming is capricious, but ticket sales have the potential to generate significant revenue. Private and public funders, following differ- ent objectives and logics, can compensate for market-related revenue risks (Baumol & Bowen, 1966). Further, many arts organizations have recently extended their missions to reflect the social value of art, adding to their mix of objectives – and logics (Dragićević Šešić, 2020; Kawashima, 2006; Löfgren, 2016; Røyseng, 2019). The dynamic is complex.' (Reid & Fjellvær, 2023, p.2).

[19] For ProInspire, a US-based non-profit working in the field of racial equality, a shift to co-leadership offered a more inclusive model that enabled Bianca Casanova Anderson to step up into a co-CEO role, despite initial reluctance when approached about operating as a sole CEO. She explains, in Chary 2020: "I wanted a more humane and caring leadership experience – to be a leader and have a life outside of work – than I had experienced in executive leadership before… For me, as a woman of colour, shared leadership feels like it centers my needs to be an authentically whole person and an organisational leader."

[20] A recent study of the 87 public companies listed in the S&P and the Russell 1000 from 1996-2020 found their shareholder return to be higher than their peers (9.5% compared with 6.9%) and that nearly 60% of companies led by co-CEOs out-performed their single-leader peers. (Feigen et al., 2022).

[21] Sally (2002) concludes on the following recommendations for effective coleadership: 'co-leaders arrive and depart together and have no chance of a solo role, roles are equivalent, only one office, co-leadership is diffused to other levels, each co-leader has veto power, no sacrosanct areas, no speaking ill of the other, and mobilizes duality and humility.' (Sally 2002 cited in Denis, et al., 2012 p.236).

[22] 'One of the other issues that there wasn't clearly defined roles between the two directors, and that, that in this case, because there was already quite a bit of uncertainty on other fronts, that that lack of definition of role was also really an issue.'(Chair)

[23] Interviewee discussing a recent recruitment: 'I emailed the recruitment consultant to ask is the board interested or open to joint applicants for AD, and she emailed me back and said, they're not actively looking for that. But if you can make a strong enough case for it, then there is no reason not to go for it. And I'm hearing underneath that, my intuition is, they're not looking then they don't want that. So I didn't waste my time and apply.'

[24] 'The benefits massively outweigh the disadvantages but some boards can be nervous about things like decision-making.' Executive Recruitment specialist interview.

[25] 'We would like to hear from applicants – whether groups, partnerships, or individuals – who have the vision, the energy, the expertise and the resourcefulness to lead our organisation into the next phase in its history, following the upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic and urgent calls for racial justice across the cultural industries…. We are looking for bold and inspiring leaders who can generate radical new ideas and ways of working; who can advocate for those artists and practices historically underrepresented within Live Art; who can advance Live Art's expanding frames of reference and parameters of practice; and who are committed to developing structures and processes to ensure that the agency of artists is central to LADA's operations and programmes. We welcome job shares and collectives, including collaborations between artists and arts workers.' (Live Art Development Agency, 2021).

[26] Cited in the Sundance Institute report, playwright Mike Lew describes how leadership roles had become unattractive to many of his contemporaries: 'I've noticed a lot of people who, in prior generations, would be shoo-ins for the kinds of [artistic leadership] jobs that are coming up are avoiding them because it feels like a headache. I think that there's like, this tranche of potential leaders who are not being engaged by the current model. And so if there's a way to reconfigure how business is done, I would like to do that to have people working to the fullest extent of their talents.' (Alick, 2021, p.19)