

## **Clare Leadership: the origin story**

### **2000-2001: how the wrong proposal led to the right solution**

So how did Clare Leadership really begin? As is sometimes the case with new ventures, with happenstance. The brief conjoining of two forces – one educational, globally-recognised and centuries-old, and one small, philanthropic and (relatively) young. Between them they set the process of its evolution in motion, after which the latter quickly moved to reject the former in favour of creating something entirely new, with and for the cultural sector it supported.

By 2000 the Clare Duffield Foundation (CDF) was allocating in excess of £4 million a year to charitable causes, and had been an occasional donor to Oxford University, particularly to one college, Lady Margaret Hall, where its Chair, Dame Vivien Duffield, had studied in the 1960s, and to the University's Ashmolean Museum, where it had funded an education post for many years. The Foundation's Chair knew Wafic Saïd, funder of Oxford's Saïd Business School (SBS), which had been founded in 1996 and was set to move into its new building in 2001. SBS was actively fundraising in the run up to opening its new home, and approached the Foundation with a £2 million proposal to fund a Chair in Cultural Management (*not* leadership). In reality this was a request to endow a Professorship, a sum to be invested which would have earned the University a return over time, but over which the Foundation would have had no control. CDF only very rarely supported endowments, so this grant would have been unusual.

At this point the Foundation was already aware that something needed to change in the cultural sector. It was funding many cultural organisations, often supporting the creation of their Clare Learning Spaces, and in some cases was experiencing first-hand their leadership issues. By the early 2000s there had been recent crises at the Royal Opera House (where CDF's Chair was a board member), English National Opera, the British Museum and elsewhere. Many top cultural jobs were being given to overseas applicants – the Southbank Centre, the Royal Opera House, Tate Modern, and the Royal Ballet School all appointed directors from overseas around this time, with successful candidates coming from Australia, the United States, New Zealand and elsewhere. Tate Modern's first director (appointed in 1998) was Swedish, working in Denmark; its second, appointed five years later, was from Spain.

The UK was demonstrably not growing its own cultural leaders effectively, and where home-grown leaders were in post, it is not wide of the mark to state that many of them were white, Oxbridge-educated men. The profiles of the selection committees that appointed them were probably not dissimilar. Social justice and white privilege were not terms being widely used by the sector in 2001, although the project started out with the ambition of addressing '*issues of gender and ethnicity*'. The first DaDaFest (now a biennial festival) to develop and celebrate talent in disability and Deaf Arts, had taken place in 2001, and at the time there were disabled leaders of disability arts organisations, but rarely disabled leaders of arts organisations more widely. A culture of ableism – again not a word being applied widely in the sector at the time – was deeply ingrained. CDF was particularly focused on the absence of women in senior leadership roles as the driver for new thinking around the sector's leadership. At that point, not only had all the directors of the National Theatre since Laurence Olivier been white and male, but they had all graduated from the same university (Cambridge).

It was also being recognised that these were very difficult and demanding jobs, as the shocking suicides of two senior cultural leaders at the time, both linked to work stress,

had distressingly revealed. There was little talk then of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Aside from the international recruitment factor, where successful leaders were in post in the UK, it was evident that their achievements could be attributed to what we termed at the time, '*luck rather than design*': talented cellists running orchestras; talented curators running museums. Very few leaders had actually been trained to do the job they found themselves doing. Certainly they had not been trained to lead complex capital projects and expansions on the back of the arrival of National Lottery funding in the mid-1990s. And very few indeed were women. A report from the then Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries in 2001 described a leadership vacuum in regional museums, alongside professional inertia, apathy, low morale and a lack of aspiration.<sup>1</sup> A similar assessment had appeared in a major report on UK theatres in 2000.<sup>2</sup> This context of concern proved to be a precursor to new thinking about leadership within the UK's cultural sector. CDF wasn't the only organisation starting to theorise about what changes would be required, but it was in a position to devise a plan of action and to fund its long-term implementation. Could it devise something that would begin to address sector skills, confidence and resilience?

The proposal from Oxford University was considered, but how could a £2 million donation be anything other than a band-aid on the perceived problem? There was some early and inconclusive thinking about who might possibly be appointed to the role at Oxford, which in itself revealed that a single individual could never be the answer. The key conclusion for CDF was that whatever it did should be led by *demand* rather than *supply*, so the decision as to whether to proceed with university involvement was ultimately an easy one. A university determining the necessary course of action to solve a cultural sector problem could never be the right approach. CDF could not impose a solution: what was needed was a period of extensive cultural sector consultation to determine what the sector actually needed.

CDF's Chair was keen for Clore Duffield to consider how it might respond to sector unease and disquiet other than by endowing a university professorship. Following the Foundation's £7m donation to the cultural sector to support cultural learning across the UK in 1998, she was keen to pursue another major initiative. As 2001 drew to a close, the CDF board agreed a proposal to establish a small working group to examine the problem and to consult on the need, then to devise solutions, which would be submitted to the board at the end of 2002, for implementation during 2003.

## **2002: A year of research, consultation and programme design**

Early in 2002 CDF parted company with Oxford, and set out on a year of research and development to identify what was needed, and then to work out how it might be implemented. For CDF this was then a new kind of progressive philanthropy, already in play elsewhere: foundations as development agencies in order to target the bigger picture, moving away from the increasingly outdated notion of foundations as cash machines. It was in CDF's interest for the cultural organisations it funded to be well-led, on behalf of their audiences, and it was a key step to fund an initiative with the aim of benefitting the sector as a whole. We weren't then using the term 'sector-support organisation', but in effect that was what we were creating. Paul Hamlyn Foundation has since helpfully coined the term 'backbone organisation', and this is exactly what Clore Leadership was to become.

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<sup>1</sup> *Renaissance in the Regions: A New Vision for England's Museums* (2001) London, Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Boyden Report on the English Regional Producing Theatres (2000) London, Arts Council of England.

The CDF Director, Sally Bacon, had been introduced to John Holden, then at Demos, by Karen Knight, Director of the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA), through his work on libraries.<sup>3</sup> CDF's Director already knew Professor Robert Hewison and connecting Holden with Hewison as colleagues on the CDF project was a key step. They reported to the CDF Director and to the other working group members. Arts Council England (ACE) was represented by Pauline Tambling, then Executive Director (Research and Development), with education and training as part of her portfolio. Karen Knight represented MLA until her departure during 2002. The two non-departmental public bodies were seen at the outset as vital partners in the delivery of a new initiative for the sector, which would need to be a public-private partnership if it was to succeed. Hewison and Holden, with their complementary cultural policy, academic and think tank credentials, effectively reported to Bacon and Tambling throughout 2002. Siobhan Edwards (who in later years was appointed to work as Fellowship Director for a second programme, Clore Social Leadership) provided support for the consultation process.<sup>4</sup>

Having abandoned the Oxford proposal, in January 2002 the small project working group, joined by its two-strong research and writing team, set out on its own with the endorsement of the CDF board. It was liberating and definitely far more cost-effective to go it alone. The 'institute' idea was soon jettisoned. At this point we were still using the word 'management': leadership was yet to be identified as the critical element. The Hewison and Holden-led shift to 'leadership' from 'management' – the separation of leadership capabilities from managerial competencies – came early on and was crucial. Although there was a close analysis of leadership typologies, the group never overly worried about definitions, viewing the sector itself as broad and self-defining – whatever emerged was going to be cross-disciplinary and relevant for the entire cultural sector, spanning the arts, cultural and creative sectors, across material culture and the performing arts. You could not easily define a heterogeneous sector that never stood still and in which art forms were constantly evolving in an era of rapid digital change.

The wider concept of the 'creative industries' was then very new, having only recently come into common parlance in 1998 when Chris Smith, as the new Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, commissioned the first mapping document of the sector. Hewison and Holden observed in 2014 that *'Arguably there was no "cultural sector" before the Programme came along, only a set of sub-sectors ... that rarely communicated with each other, and were sometimes in competition.'*<sup>5</sup>

Research indicated early on that the sector was under-investing in management and leadership development at the most senior levels. This was following a period of financial attrition in terms of arts funding, although of course the late 1990s seems in retrospect to be a time of plenty for the sector in comparison with the post-Covid era. What we did then know was that the percentage of payroll spent by organisations on staff training was tiny in most cases. There was an *'undercurrent of anti-managerialism'* – training was *ad hoc* rather than strategic and (importantly) not valued.<sup>6</sup> It was often viewed as remedial rather than developmental. Coaching was rare and, where it existed, clandestine; no-one liked to admit that they needed it or had sought it out. We identified only one senior leader who readily acknowledged that they had benefited from coaching.

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<sup>3</sup> MLA was later subsumed within Arts Council England in 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Following the success of Clore Leadership in the cultural sector, [Clore Social Leadership](#) was launched in 2008 to develop leadership skills in the wider voluntary sector.

<sup>5</sup> Hewison and Holden (2014) *Fellowship and Partnership: The Leadership Programmes of the Clore Duffield Foundation*, London, Clore Duffield Foundation.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Geoffrey Holland (1997) *Review of Management Training and Development in the Museums, Galleries and Heritage sector*, London, Museum Training Institute.

There was a bubbling desire to inject some design into the process of running – *leading* – cultural organisations.

Were there any other models we could consider? It seemed that there was little of interest to us in the UK apart from an excellent two-week, residential course for museum leaders at the University of East Anglia, set up by Nichola Johnson, but there was no cross-cultural leadership training available. In the States there were two models that were worth scrutiny: an international Getty Museum Leaders course (up to four weeks, residential, again for museums), and also the model which was then in development and which was launched in 2001: a new Institute for Arts Management at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington led by the (American) former Director of the Royal Opera House in London. The Institute provided ten-month Fellowships for up to ten individuals a year, but attached to a single performing arts venue. Hewison visited all three to consider their content and interview their directors.

CDF had learnt through its Oxford experience that a university partnership might not be the way forward, but other academic partnerships were actively explored during 2002, specifically with the London School of Economics and the London Business School. It took a while to move away entirely from an academic approach, but ultimately these partnerships could not progress for several reasons. The first was that it rapidly became clear that the faculty to teach cultural leadership did not exist. Eminent business studies lecturers who we were told ‘enjoyed going to the opera’ materialised before us, and we quickly came to realise that the best ‘faculty’ for Clore was primarily going to comprise experienced sector leaders themselves. Second, university accreditation came with a huge price tag. Did we really need it? Our early/mid-career arts workers aspiring to be arts leaders were not seeking accreditation, they were seeking training, support and networking. So could we create the faculty ourselves? Could we build something distinctive with rigour, depth and value? Could we construct our own cost-effective but high-quality training by drawing on the skills and experience of existing senior leaders? And could that, in time, acquire a status more relevant and powerful within the cultural sector than the imprimatur of any university? Importantly the requisite body of knowledge did not seem to exist within the academic world. The lack of inhouse expertise meant it would have been a case of transferring business school knowledge about leadership and management (classic MBA content) onto the cultural sector, which collectively spoke a fundamentally different language, was guided by a very different vision and mission, and held a distinctly different set of values.

The research process was iterative, and concentrated on three phases of consultation. In February 2002 there was an initial document setting out the problem, shared with 150 cultural leaders, to which written responses were received. This was followed in June 2002 by a first attempt at thinking through a solution, which garnered many comments and suggestions. Finally, a third paper, informed by almost 200 responses, was circulated to around 600 arts leaders in the early autumn. This broadly set out the plans for the Clore Leadership Programme, and the responses at this point were generally warm and supportive – we had broad consensus. In total there were four formal working group meetings during the year. Along the way many meetings took place, and there were several research trips. We had anticipated consultation seminars, but in the end these weren’t deemed necessary. And the development process meant that programme ideas and principles could be gradually formulated.

In addition to the important early assumptions that whatever emerged should be cross cultural and of the highest quality, the three cornerstone principles that emerged through

the consultation were that the programme should be bespoke (one size would not fit all); for *aspiring* rather than existing senior leaders; and that participants would be engaged over a sustained period (not just for two or four weeks as was the case with the UEA and Getty programmes). Nothing similar was found to exist in any context, academic or otherwise. The cross-cultural point was particularly important for a sector used to working in separate silos and not building shared agendas. This would be a coming together of diverse cultural sub-sectors, from art to archives, drama to dance, museums to music – and, importantly, from small-scale to large-scale.

A set of guiding principles for the process were not in place at the outset but a set of principles for the programme itself gradually coalesced during the period of research. They are interesting to revisit more than two decades later, and although we might change some of the language now (for example, the inclusion of disability and championing diversity), by and large they all still hold true for Clore Leadership today:

- Listening to professionals and practitioners
- Avoiding duplication of what already existed
- Creating a proposal which would be owned by the sector
- Ensuring whatever was provided would be of the highest quality
- Addressing issues of gender and ethnicity
- Integrating leadership theory with practice
- Recognising leadership existed at many levels and had many titles
- Learning from practical examples of what worked
- Primarily addressing the UK context, but learning from international partners
- A forward-looking focus
- A focus on looking to the long term
- The need to adapt and modify in light of experience at every stage
- Making use of new technologies
- Investing in people, not bricks and mortar

It was realised early on that the resulting programme would need to invest large sums in individuals – this was unprecedented for CDF, which had spent many millions on capital projects since its formation. The concept of a ‘fellowship’ was brought to the fore by Hewison and Holden early on, and was also key in considering bringing together a cohort of leaders and building the connection between them: in appointing and investing in Clore ‘Fellows’, the programme was to be as much about the power of the collective group as it was to be about individuals.

Two factors emerged during the R&D period which could not be directly addressed by the new programme plans. One was remuneration. Salary levels were found to be low in comparison with cultural leaders in the US and Europe. The other was cultural sector governance, but it was thought that other solutions would be found for this in due course (and so it has proved, with Clore Leadership playing a key role).<sup>7</sup>

By the close of 2002 seven core programme elements had been identified, including intense residential experiences for Fellows at the beginning and end of their programme; periods of individual reflection and research; immersion in new working environments; and buying into existing courses to address specific individual training needs. It was anticipated that twenty-plus Fellows would be appointed each year and they would each spend up to two years on their Fellowships. The elements as originally conceived were:

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<sup>7</sup> The [Cultural Governance Alliance](#) is a strategic collective of partners from across the cultural sector which have joined with Clore Leadership to champion, share and promote best practice in the governance of culture.

1. Residential courses – two residentials, each lasting a fortnight
2. A secondment – three months, with real responsibilities, often in an unfamiliar sector
3. Bursaries – to meet the costs of attending specific existing development and training courses (different for each individual)
4. A mentor
5. A coach
6. Research fellowships
7. Annual event – a ‘Leadership Lab’

The CDF Director was now in a position to share the proposals with the CDF board and there was an emphasis on case studies to make visible the need and the demand. Two fictional early/mid-career leaders were imagined and presented. Of course they bore no relation to the first applicants themselves, but they animated and made the programme real in a way that the theory could not. The CDF board gave the greenlight for the initiative in December 2002, acknowledging that support would need to be for the long term – we were already talking about a ten-year investment, a rare thing in funding terms. The following year was spent recruiting a director and securing premises, so that they could then recruit the team members, work with them to put the detailed programme together, and to secure co-funding, locking in the public/private/professional partnerships we always knew would be needed. Clore Leadership opened for applications early in 2004 and the first Fellows were appointed in the summer, before commencing their Fellowships in September 2004.

#### **2024: Looking back after two decades**

Twenty years since the first Clore Fellows were appointed it is possible to see that what CDF was actually doing was *leading*. It would probably not have acknowledged that at the time, but in committing to a research-based approach and consulting widely; building something new; working in coalition with others; committing significant funds and putting a marker down for long-term, serious investment, it was leading the way in terms of setting the agenda for a new approach to cultural leadership, encouraging the entire sector to properly acknowledge its own leadership needs and capabilities for the first time. This was about a foundation working with others to achieve a sustainable impact beyond its immediate grantees for the sector as a whole.

Several factors enabled success. We learnt that nothing buys confidence so effectively as guaranteed money on the table (and money is of course a specific form of privilege – and power). A simple funding formula worked in the beginning – CDF covering all operational costs and other stakeholders funding (CDF-subsidised) sector-specific Fellowships – and enabled a close examination of the leadership skills gap in specific cultural sub-sectors, such as archives, cultural learning, or dance. An additional success factor was undoubtedly operating independently of government strictures and time-frames.

What did success look like in 2004 and in the early days of Clore Leadership? We were pleased then to see a very high level of applications. To secure almost £1m in external funding. To forge a large number of partnerships with funders, secondment hosts, mentors, training providers and host universities for research fellowships. To see Fellows’ senior leadership destinations quickly exceeding expectations. To secure direct Treasury investment for the addition of short courses. To witness a proliferation of other cultural leadership interventions (even if many were not to last). And most importantly to

see a cohort of new leaders set to regenerate cultural institutions for decades into the future.

And what surprised us in those early days? Possibly the unanticipated power of the personal journey for the individuals themselves, with its moments of honest reflection. And also the power of group cohesion – always desired but difficult to orchestrate or to plan for – which emerged naturally through the intensive residentials. Maybe the very choice of the word ‘Fellowship’ was a deliberate act of nominative determinism.

Over the past two decades many people have written about the creation of Clore Leadership, including those not involved in its formation. Looking back it is possible to see that several factors were key to its initial success. Ultimately CDF was pushing at an open door. In a new millennium, a new era of generous, values-based leadership was needed, moving away from the notion of a ‘heroic’ leader to ‘relational leadership’, with its emphasis on teambuilding and on leaders as enablers. CDF could see that a rising tide might just begin to raise all boats. As an established cultural funder it could garner support, but as a non-government agency it could remain fleet of foot, operating outside of three- to five-year government cycles of funding, and could commit for the seriously long term (now two decades and counting). And it based all that it did on deep and wide consultation: its demand-led approach was critical. Of course appointing the hugely-qualified former Secretary of State for Culture to head it up gave Clore Leadership all the authority it needed to establish itself and to build the strategic partnerships that would be essential to its success, but the groundwork had been laid. Chris Smith, who became a Life Peer in 2005, and his Deputy Director Sue Hoyle, were able to build on firm foundations.

We definitely didn’t know it at the time, but period of the early 2000s was a time of plenty. Clore Leadership has had to contend with financial crashes, economic uncertainty and cuts in public funding, a global pandemic, the evolution of the cultural sector in response to significant and powerful societal shifts with Black Lives Matter, MeToo, Brexit, the Climate Emergency and a digital revolution. Facebook was launched just a few months before the first Fellows were appointed in 2004, after which YouTube, Twitter, Spotify, the Apple iPhone and Netflix all followed in quick succession before the financial crash of 2008.

Through all of this, and because of Clore Leadership’s firm funder-led foundations and its ‘backbone’ strength, it has enabled its many Clore Leaders always to be adaptive, and not just to navigate change but to drive it. The concept of ‘Fellowship’ came to the fore during the pandemic in the spring of 2020, when multiple cohorts of Fellows gathered online to support each other through unprecedented closures. Their shared values, and their connection to each other, are vital in their approach to leading the sector. As Hilary Carty (Director of Clore Leadership since 2017) astutely commented during the first months of the pandemic, *‘optimism is to be found in coalitions’*. Today Clore stands for values-based leadership, harnessing potential, generosity, championing diversity, flexibility, and leading in a context of challenge and change. As Sue Hoyle was later to observe, the programme was not simply trying to change the leadership of culture; it also wanted to change the culture of leadership. Sally Bacon wrote in 2014 that *‘Change will always be an important element ... enabling Fellows to deal with changes within the political, social and economic contexts in which they work; changing and improving ways of working, thinking, communicating, sharing and funding; and occasionally changing the very language we use to describe what we do.’* As we always

knew, whatever model we devised in 2002 was always going to operate in contexts which we could not then foresee, and extend far beyond our original ambitions.

One thing has come full circle: Tate Modern has again appointed a director from overseas, with only one of the five directors in the course of its history having been British – but the art world operates internationally, and now that the UK has left the EU maybe it has become newly important to signal our internationalism as a sector. And the Director of all four Tate galleries since 2017 is, of course, a Clore Fellow from the programme's inaugural year.

Two decades ago CDF proposed seven elements for the first group of Fellows. Quite rightly these foundational elements have shifted over time – for very good reasons – in a rapidly changing world. Some remain, but in a different form to that originally conceived by Hewison and Holden. Clore Leadership has upheld its own founding principle that asserted the need *'to adapt and modify in light of experience at every stage.'* Short courses, including for emerging leaders, quickly came to sit alongside the Fellowship programme, and now there is a menu of short- and long-term courses available, lasting from a single day to ten days, to one year, and more than 2,500 Clore Leaders work across the sector and beyond. Some courses are on specific themes (such as leading systemic change); are for leaders in specific geographical areas; or are for specific groups (Global Majority or emerging leaders). Another founding principle – *'recognising that leadership exists at many levels and has many titles'* – has held true as the programme has worked to address leadership at all levels, and to support the pipeline into senior sector leadership.

In the early days of Clore Leadership, trusts and foundations, governments, funding bodies, research councils, businesses, cultural organisations and a cadre of existing senior leaders all came together to align around a central mission to nurture the next generation. When it advertised for its first Fellows twenty years ago, Clore Leadership was already one of the most important ventures in CDF's history. It was the UK's first cross-disciplinary leadership programme for the arts, cultural and creative sectors. Today it is a testament to its solid foundations, its many funders and partners, the leadership of its three experienced directors and their delivery teams – and to the leaders who have grown along with it – that its impact in the cultural world has been so meaningful and enduring. In the end, the right proposition did indeed emerge from the wrong proposal.

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