

# **Organising, sensemaking, devising:**

## **Understanding what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations**

Submitted by Susan Kay, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in Leadership Studies, July 2014.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this enquiry is to challenge and add a further dimension to cultural management, through an empirical exploration of what cultural managers do in a particular domain (theatre) and scale of organisation (micro-) within the (subsidised) cultural sector, in South West England.

Working from a sensemaking perspective (Weick, 1979, 1995a, 2009), it focuses attention on what these practitioners do, rather than what they could, should or do not do. It draws on literature from cultural management, theatre and performance studies and organisation and management studies to help address the following questions:

- *What* do cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations (in South West England)?
- *Why* do they do what they do?
- *How* do they do what they do?
- In what ways might an analysis of what they do *inform* talk in and about cultural management?
- To what other theoretical conversations might such an analysis *contribute*?

The subjects are three cultural managers running micro-scale contemporary theatre organisations in Bristol, Plymouth and Redruth. The study adopts a qualitative, ethnographic, multi-case study approach, with data collected through non-participant observation, informal interviews and documentary sources. Analysis is inductive, deductive and abductive.

The thesis concludes with a conceptual and epistemological re-framing of cultural management as cultural *managing*, suggesting that what the cultural managers studied do is not only vocationally dedicated *to* the purpose, values and work of their organisation, but is also isomorphically inflected *by* them *in the doing*. Furthermore, it offers (a) an adjusted perspective on “high reliability organising” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007) orientated more towards making the best than mitigating the worst; (b) a focus on organising *in* theatre to colleagues pursuing the relationship between management and the arts; and (c) a challenge to traditional notions of divide between theatre managing and theatre

making, particularly at the micro-scale. This is an interdisciplinary study with cross-disciplinary implications.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Karl Weick, sensemaking scholar and Professor Emeritus of Organizational Behavior and Psychology, University of Michigan:

Walking is the means to find things worth talking about. People discover what they think by looking at what they say, how they feel, and where they walk. The talk makes sense of walking, which means those best able to walk the talk are the ones who actually talk the walking they find themselves doing most often, with most intensity, and with most satisfaction (Weick, 1995a, p. 182).

Tim Etchells, Artistic Director, Forced Entertainment (British experimental theatre company):

They [the company] had this unspoken agreement that no one would bring anything too complete to the [creative] process – a few scraps or fragments of text, an idea or two for action, a costume, an idea about space, a sketched out piece of music – everything unfinished, distinctly incomplete – so there'd be more spaces for other things to fill in... more dots to join (Etchells, 1999, p. 51).

Let me open with some fragments.

## ***Fragment one***

On the cover of a special edition of the *Journal of Arts and Communities* (2012) – “dedicated to critical reflections about the relationship between arts and management” and particularly “the impact and affect [sic] of management paradigms on arts research, practices and approaches” – is a photograph of a white, thick set, middle-aged man, with short-back-and-sides and a pinstripe suit. Here is the archetypal manager, confident and in control, staring implacably at the camera. Only, his left eye is closed; his face has just been splattered with yellow paint, thrown by an artist who remains out of shot.

## ***Fragment two***

In a special edition of the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (2014) which explores the intersection of management and arts as an emerging field within management and organisation studies (increasingly referred to as “the art of...”), Meisiek and Barry put their cards – enthusiastically – on the table:

The arts hold a promise for management: that management, organizations, and work itself will become better – more effective, yes, but also more interesting, meaningful, attractive, original – when artistic perspectives are employed (2014, p. 134).

### ***Fragment three***

In a millennial edition of the *International Journal of Arts Management* (2000) Evrard and Colbert reflect that:

Arts management is frequently perceived as constituting a new terrain for the dissemination of managerial thought, a view that is particularly common in the management field. This approach perceives the arts as a managerially underdeveloped area that would benefit from being fertilized (some would even say “normalized”) by the importing of managerial knowledge and techniques (2000, p. 7).

These fragments – when stitched together – form a discernible, though dysfunctional, loop: artists are disdainful of bean-counting managers who seek to constrain artistic impulse; a growing number of management scholars are tantalised by what arts metaphors and practices seem to offer a post-millennial, post-crunch organisational world; and those who manage in the arts are in a curious double-bind, holding little credibility with either constituency.

This constructed loop bounds my study, and here it is necessary to declare a personal and professional interest. As an arts manager (one of the 39,370 “arts officers, producers and directors” operating in this country – Creative & Cultural Skills, 2012) I have been tangled up in this loop for the past thirty years: running small scale theatres and arts centres; working as a regional officer for Arts Council England; heading up the arts management department of a specialist, performing arts HEI; providing executive leadership for the South West regional cultural consortium (funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport), and now operating freelance as a cultural sector trainer and consultant both in the UK and abroad. In all that time, I’ve never been able to come up with a satisfactory – or even particularly coherent – answer to the question: ‘so what is it you actually *do*, then?’ beyond the “abstract generalities” (Mintzberg, 1973) or “how to” guidance I have accumulated along the way, neither of which seem,



properly, to nail it. This is not to be disingenuous or obtuse: it's more a case of the nose being too close to the grindstone.

And I am not alone, as intimated by:

#### ***Fragment four***

In a publication about managers and producers in theatre and dance (*Passion and Performance*, 2007) Hutchins, Kay and Perinpanayagam observe that:

...like all arts managers, [they] rarely record their experiences, or analyse their working practices... They prefer to...pass on their knowledge and experience by having someone work beside them rather than writing a book on how to do it... The invisibility of their contribution is another shared characteristic. Their names appear on programmes, but rarely is there a biography or a photograph (2007, p. 2).

While arts managers may do lots of talking *in* their work, they don't do much talking *about* it; which is not to say that there isn't a considerable amount of talk *around* it.

#### **Arts and cultural management**

Arts management as a profession is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and as a field of enquiry it is not yet fifty years old. Drawing on Kay and Summerton (1998), the most visible arts managers are located in theatres, arts centres, media centres, galleries, dance houses, concert halls and myriad other creative 'businesses' working across the public, private and third sectors. The term still tends to be associated with those who run organisations, although there are many more responsible for marketing, education, programming, curating, development, front-of-house (for example) who also play an essential part in fashioning what one early writer (Pick, 1980) called the "aesthetic contract" between artist and audience. Over the last forty plus years, the arts and cultural management field has become broader and more structurally complex, and this is reflected in changing nomenclature. In the early days the label used was arts administrator, which then became arts manager, which in turn gave way to cultural manager (and cultural administrator, to delineate those working in cultural development at local, national and international governmental level). This century, two further labels: cultural leader and creative producer have been added to the (UK) list. The term cultural manager is used in this thesis.

There are those who trace the beginnings of cultural management to the ancient world, pointing to the fashioning of an exchange or contract between makers or creators of art and their audiences or customers. In other words, painters, actors, dancers, musicians, composers, writers and craftspeople were the first to practise arts management. Over time, others became involved and different areas of work became increasingly specialised, although – it must be stressed – there are many thousands of sole practitioners who continue to fashion this contract (and all the work that goes with it) themselves.

Nevertheless, as Summerton (Kay & Summerton, 1998, p. 2) notes, those “who ran theatres 300 years ago were referred to as ‘the management’ long before the emergence of the idea of management as the prerogative of the commercial world in general”. Cultural managers now work in, with and outside organisations and across a broad range of activity, setting and context. It is small wonder, then, that the field has been referred to as not one, but rather a “family of occupations” (DiMaggio, 1987).

Despite what might seem like a straightforward historical trajectory, cultural management as a contemporary profession and emerging academic discipline is both complex and contested. In what might be termed theoretical strands of talk, cultural management (and by implication what cultural managers do) has been habitually depicted in terms of **divides**, **difference** and **deficit** with the more recent adoption of a **dauntless** strand of discourse.

### **Divide**

For many scholars, cultural management derives from ‘classical’ management theory, in that it comprises areas of planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling (Fayol, 1949 [1916]) which are applied to, but remain functionally separate from, art (Byrnes, 2003; Martin, 1998). For others, the starting point is the recognition of a self-evident and long-established ideological stand-off, with commerce as an unwelcome – though inevitable – intruder on the world of culture (Adorno, 1991; Bourdieu, 1996). Here – in recognition of this *divide* – it is the job of the cultural manager to exercise bilingualism, work across borders, and be Janus-faced in order to do her job (Bendixen, 2000; Brkic, 2009; Foehl, 2008).

## ***Difference***

Another strand of scholarship has focused on the perceived *differences* between classic (business) management and cultural management (especially in the subsidised part of the sector). Here the focus is on the absence of a simple monetary ‘bottom line’; the particularity of an artistic work environment; the often intangible and fleeting nature of a cultural product and the challenges of mediating it to an external public; the level of risk involved; the requirement to satisfy the policy and or other priorities of multiple stakeholders; the ongoing scarcity of resources, and the frequent reliance on volunteers as board members and co-workers. The associated literature explores how these differences can be integrated into work areas like marketing, PR, management of people and place, strategic planning, leadership, fundraising and financial control (Chong, 2002, 2010; Hagoort, 2000; Hewison & Holden, 2002, 2011; Hill, O’Sullivan, C. & O’Sullivan, T., 1995; Palmer, 1998; Pick & Anderton, 1996, 1999; Radbourne & Fraser, 1996) without necessarily moving outside the “systems-control” paradigm (Watson, 2002), which underpins classical management theory.

## ***Deficit***

The *deficit* strand – the idea that cultural managers are in need of constant development and improvement – has gained strength as the cultural sector has initiated/ welcomed, absorbed and been affected by changing labels, circumstances and expectations (Hewison, 2004; Leadbeater, 2005a; Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008).

The advent of the ‘cultural and creative industries’ in the 1990s, ‘cultural leadership’ in the 2000s, ‘cultural entrepreneurship’ and the ‘creative economy’ in the 2010s – alongside ongoing cuts in public expenditure, developments in digital technology, increasing globalisation, and a pressing climate change agenda – now requires cultural managers to be ever-more resilient, leaderful, partnership-orientated, enterprising, digitally savvy, outward-looking and sustainability-aware. Similar demands are made of managers in other sectors, so this is not to argue a special case; what is notable however, is that in the cultural management field, the literature arguing for these new skills, techniques and competencies invariably draws on ‘best practice’ models from mid to large scale cultural organisations, or from the corporate sector. While this kind of

magpie activity is not unusual (cultural management has ‘borrowed’ systematically for the past forty years), such one-way traffic, over time, can lead to the application of inappropriate yardsticks and, by default, the down-grading of home-grown knowledge and expertise, particularly among the majority of cultural and creative organisations operating at a much smaller scale (Beirne, 2012; Beirne & Knight, 2002a; Bilton, 2006, 2007; Summerton, 1996).

### ***Dauntlessness***

In contrast to such notions of deficit and ‘overload’, however, there is the more recent development of a *dauntless* strand, which comes closest to (but does not yet connect with) ‘the art of...’ fragment identified at the start. Attention here focuses on the role of the cultural manager as strategic change agent in times of significant cultural crisis and upheaval. The associated writing explores the contribution that cultural managers can make to a re-alignment of the relationship between culture, politics and the public in order to build greater legitimacy with citizens (Holden, 2004, 2006). It sees cultural managers and organisations as exemplars of the kind of 21<sup>st</sup> century people, creative adhocracies and cultural leadership that are needed to thrive in powerful times (Leicester, 2007, 2010). And it calls for cultural management to extend beyond the stewardship of practices, organisations and domains to include advocacy for a “vibrant expressive life” as a public good within a democracy (Ivey, 2009).

The global financial crisis of 2008 has given added impetus to this strand, and the call for new business and finance models, increased collaboration and partnership, and more diversity within the cultural sector, is clearly articulated (Foster, 2010; Holden, Keiffer, Newbiggin & Wright, 2009; Wright, Keiffer, Holden & Newbiggin, 2013; Bakhshi, Radhika & Freeman, 2010). Within this context there is renewed interest in the working habits of micro-scale cultural and creative enterprises as possible exemplars of a post-crunch way forward for the rest of the economy (Dods, 2014; Kaiser, 2011).

In and across the cultural management field, then, there is a growing and varied body of theory and debate (Aristotle’s *episteme*) and an identifiable and evolving skills-base (*techne*). What is less apparent, however, is any sustained focus on *phronesis*, or practical wisdom; which Grint (2007, pp. 233-242) describes as establishing the collective “good” in a particular context and situation, and “stitching together whatever is at hand...to ensure practical

success”, something that is achieved through ongoing experience and reflection. This is not to advance the view that practice always knows best; rather an observation that the prevailing conversation in cultural management is more an exhortation to ‘walk the talk’ (turning theory into practice) than ‘talk the walk’ (collecting wisdom from doing and reflecting). Moreover, the daily working life of the cultural manager is rarely put under the analytical spotlight, *particularly* when her working environment is micro-scale (i.e. employing four people or fewer).

This study is an effort to redress the balance and add a new dimension, by taking a closer look at cultural managers and their “daily doings” (Mangham & Pye, 1991) in micro-scale organisations, in the company of others who – through empirical enquiry – are questioning prevailing discourses in the field (Beirne, 2012; Beirne & Knight, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Hutchins et al., 2007; Kuesters, 2010; Summerton, 1996, 2010; Tyndall, 2007).

More specifically – for reasons of art form familiarity, geographical location and access – it focuses on three *theatre* managers working in one English region.

The research questions are as follows:

- *What* do cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations in South West England?
- *Why* do they do what they do?
- *How* do they do what they do?
- In what ways might an analysis of what they do *inform* talk in and about cultural management?
- To what other theoretical conversations might such an analysis *contribute*?

In addressing these questions, this study seeks not only to add a further dimension to the cultural management field, it also intends to shed new light on all four fragments identified at the start; to untangle the dysfunctional loop that they currently form, and to see what might be woven in its place. It therefore hopes to speak to several readerships: cultural management scholars and practitioners; theatre and performance scholars (artist/manager divide); and management and organisation scholars (‘the art of ...’). It is interdisciplinary both necessarily and unavoidably.

## **Theatre and performance studies**

So, as well as critiquing what has been written about cultural management in both a theoretical and empirical sense (fragments three and four), the literature review in this study examines the ways in which managers and management are portrayed in theatre and performance studies literature (fragment one), alongside contextually significant developments in those fields (Allain & Harvie, 2006; Balme, 2008; Cohen, 2011; Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007; Graham & Hoggett, 2009; Harvie & Lavender, 2010; Leach, 2013; Milling & Ley, 2001).

In the literature examined, arts/cultural management does not feature directly as a topic, though funding, project and budgeting issues are mentioned within the context of the “everyday practicalities” of theatre work (Mangan, 2013, p. 67).

Here, the arts/management and culture/commerce divides are certainly apparent when issues of time, money, people and facility management are brought into view. In the main, theatre-making and managerial work (“the pragmatic organisation of the company” Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 158), are presented as separate areas of practice which are often in tension with “the one who paints” assuming higher status than “the one who looks for food” (Hagoort, 1993). Depictions of the creative team rarely include the company manager or administrator, unless a specific decision is made to bring him or her in (Oddey, 1994); they are more often part of the “management and support team” (Helmer & Malzacher, 2004).

## **The art of...management and organisation**

Meanwhile, writing on ‘the art of...’ (fragment two) as an emerging field within organisation and management studies, seeks to draw analogies between what artists (are perceived to) do and the ways in which corporate managers *ought* to be working in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In brief, this literature can be divided into three parts. The first explores the ways in which corporate organisations and managers can *use* the arts (Austin & Devin, 2003; Seifter, 2001) e.g. for decoration, entertainment, professional development or as a “strategic process of transformation” (Darsø, 2004). The second seeks to illuminate management issues through arts-based metaphors or similes, so management is *like* the arts, and managers are (or should be) *like*

artists. Here, social and organisational life is conceptualised as *if it were* theatre (Goffman, 1959), or a symphony orchestra (Vaill, 1989), or improvisation (Barrett, 2000; Crossan, 1998; Kamoche, Cunha M.P. e & Cunha J.V.d., 2002; Sawyer, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b). The third category goes further, asserting that management *is* art, performance or theatre (Burke, 1969a, 1969b; De Pree, 1989, 1992; Grint, 2000). Some go so far as to suggest that managers should adopt arts practices and techniques and apply them directly to their work (Taylor & Carboni, 2008), even to the extent of transforming themselves into “organizational artists” (Barry, 2008).

This literature ranges from “trendy title for a book” to “rigorous and interesting thinking” (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010a, p. 235) and yet one thing remains constant throughout: the arts and cultural manager – as someone who manages *explicitly* within the context of “intendedly aesthetic experiences” (Clark, 2008) – is singularly absent, except as an exemplar of the incursion of management practices *into* the arts (Barry, 2008), i.e. traffic going in the opposite direction.

### **Process-related and organising perspectives from organisation and management studies**

Finally, the review of literature examines other theoretical perspectives drawn from management and organisation studies, beginning with those writers who have posed similar questions to those asked here.

Mintzberg’s “What do managers do?” formed the basis of his 1968 thesis and his subsequent book, *The Nature of Managerial Work*, published in 1973. His research was similarly a response to “abstract generalities devoid of the hard data of empirical study” (1973, p. vii-x). Alongside others ((Boyatzis, 1982; Carlson, 1951; Kotter, 1982, 1999; Stewart, 1967, 1976, 1982, 1989), his work called into question the primacy of ‘classical’ management thinking (Taylor, 1911) and the associated view of managers as skilled appliers of particular functions e.g. planning, organising, staffing, direction, coordination, reporting and budgeting (Gulick & Urwick, 1937) in order to maximise productivity and profit. The parallels with dominant conceptions of cultural management (particularly divide and deficit) are marked: if cultural managers can only learn to apply particular management mind-sets and techniques, then in cause-and-effect fashion, success will result. The reality – as Mintzberg et al. discovered – is more complex and messy than that.

Nevertheless, the realist assumptions behind much of this literature (for example, that organisations have a life of their own and are independent from the people who act within them); their de-contextualised and apolitically presented roles and characteristics; and their effective rejection of management as in any way purposive, do not chime with the ontological and epistemological approach this study takes. Here, the nature of social reality and our experiences of and relationships with it are brought more to the fore. This enquiry is not realist (positivist); it is informed by an interpretivist, or more specifically social constructionist paradigm: “a scholarly position that takes human interpretation as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world” (Prasad, 2005, p. 13). Thus, the question: ‘what do cultural managers do?’ is suffused with a further question: ‘what is going on here?’

Through such a perspective (Berger & Luckman, 1967, 1983; Garfinkel, 1967; Geertz, 1983):

...the organization and its structure, systems and processes don't exist as objects separate from people – they are created as organisational members talk about what they think is happening and what needs to be done (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 14).

And underlying all this is the belief that thinking, talking and doing are intimately entwined as “...a *framing of reality* that, to a certain extent, brings about that reality” (Watson, 2002, p. 4, italics in original).

So, management, far from being a fixed body of knowledge or set of tools, techniques, roles and characteristics, is a discursive construction which is therefore open to different and contestable interpretations. Not only that, both organisation and management – in the doing – cannot be fixed, completed, and done-and-dusted; they are ongoing and continually emerging in conversation and other forms of communication. As such, they are perhaps more plausibly depicted as ‘gerundive’ processes of *organising* and *managing* (2002, p. 59).

Such a “process-relational” (p. 58) view has made few in-roads to the cultural management field, where process is more usually associated with the ways in which certain functions e.g. marketing and strategic planning, are carried out. It has particular appeal here, though, in that it provides a reminder that classical management theory is a construct rather than a given; opens up possibilities for



thinking about what cultural managers do as organising; and almost inevitably leads on to sensemaking as “organising in action” (Pye, 2005, p 44).

## **Sensemaking**

Sensemaking can be described very simply as “making something sensible” (Weick, 1995a, p. 16), with making sense an ongoing process of organising. According to Weick, organising is “the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question ‘what’s the story?’” (Weick, 2009, p. 129).

Sensemaking is the process by which we construct a plausible story, or rather stories. We do this by attending to “cues” (or stimuli) from that ongoing streaming of experience, which we (individually and with others) match with “frames” (frameworks or mental models – existing beliefs, habits, ways of seeing) to make meaning. While the nuances, complexities and critiques of sensemaking are explored in more detail in the literature review, it is important to set out here, how and why *this* is a broad-based sensemaking enquiry.

First, as a researcher trying to capture something that is constantly moving and emerging (‘what cultural managers do’), I am involved in bracketing cues and connecting them to frames as an essential part of the process. This research is thus an exercise in sensemaking.

Second, in thinking about what cultural managers do as organising, and if organising is sensemaking in action, then I am inevitably engaging with cultural managers as sensemakers. I am thus looking at sensemaking *in* what they do – with others – in order to inform my sensemaking *about* what they do.

Third, there is a particular sensemaking purpose to this enquiry in that I am motivated by particular accounts of cultural management that do not quite make sense. I want to “broaden, multiply and update the number of cues with which we are willing to become acquainted...to provide a story [about what cultural managers do] that can be acted upon to provide a shape that is both generative and suitably complex” (Weick, 2012, p. 150); in other words, through theorising, to shift the frame.

Thus, sensemaking is used here as both a resource and a topic (Colville, Waterman & Weick, 1999). As a resource, sensemaking becomes integral to the ways in which the research is conducted, and as a topic, it offers a

perspective through which a new understanding of 'what cultural managers do' might be theorised.

Having established that a social constructionist paradigm informs this study which is being undertaken within "a mind-set of sensemaking" (Weick, 1995a, p. 191) attention now turns to the research methodology.

### **Research methodology**

In asking the question: 'what do cultural managers do (why and how)?' I am seeing them as active social agents, and what they do as a social phenomenon; something which is not comparable to 'matter' or amenable to the rules of positivism, but which is a matter of meaning, or "social reality as a constructed world built in and through meaningful interpretations" (Prasad, A. & Prasad, P., 2002, p. 6, after Berger & Luckman, 1967).

Furthermore, questions of what, why and how reinforce the process-oriented intentions of this enquiry. I am in search of the dynamic quality of cultural managing in particular settings and the overriding aim is to "catch this reality in flight" (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 338). My role as researcher, therefore,

...is not to capture some pre-existing or ready-made world presumed to be available out there but to understand the process[es]...through which [a particular] social world is ongoingly accomplished (Prasad, A. & Prasad, P., 2002, p. 7)

... and to address the ways in which cultural managers contribute to that accomplishment. As the "primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15) I am deliberately and unavoidably implicated in the whole exercise, and my research account is subjectively situated "relative to [my] own and [my subjects'] embedded experiences, which influence...observations, interpretations, and research accounts" (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 656).

As a consequence, this study does not seek *results* that purport to be replicable, generalisable and predictive, but rather to construct plausible *findings* which "seek... answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 8, italics in original) and which can be richly described.

In summary, this enquiry adopts a qualitative, ethnographic multiple case study approach, involving three cultural managers in micro-scale theatre organisations in the South West of England. I collected data through a triangulated combination of non-participant observation, informal interviews and documentary sources. These were analysed and interpreted through induction and deduction (implicitly straying into abductive territory). This enabled me, iteratively, to explore patterns and themes, and then build concepts against a sensemaking backdrop, before arriving at what I hope are “accurate, parsimonious, general and useful” (Weick, 1979) theoretical insights and conclusions, supporting a new perspective on what cultural managers do.

### **Conclusions and contribution**

This research removes cultural management from the strictures of systems-control thinking, received opinion and stereotype. Instead it offers a more textured, art-full and nuanced appreciation of ‘what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations’ which is not only *grounded in* the purpose, work and values of their organisation, but also – crucially – *inflected by* them in the manner and substance of their doing. With a focus on cultural *managing*, sensemaking-in-action, and the processes and strategies of devising in theatre, this enquiry points the way to a conceptual and epistemological re-framing in this emerging field, which is of relevance to practitioners and scholars alike.

Furthermore, through discussion of its nine propositions about ‘what cultural managers do’, the research *also* offers an adjusted focus on sensemaking (particularly “high reliability organizing”, Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007), theatre-making and managing, and learning from organising in theatre. Taken together, these elements weave a discourse very different from the dysfunctional loop stitched together at the start of this introduction. Thus, not only does cultural management take on a novel appearance, those other areas of study assume a different disposition too.

The contribution of this research therefore lies in and is constructed through the warp, weft and overall weave of its empirical, textual and theoretical cloth.

## Structure of the thesis

In order most effectively to explore and address my research questions, this thesis is structured as follows:

- **Chapter One** is this **introduction**
- **Chapter Two** is the **literature review**. In order to develop a convincing argument and imperative for my research questions, this is divided into four parts: the cultural management field; theatre and performance studies; the intersection between management and the arts ('the art of...'), and process-orientated and organising perspectives in organisation and management studies, to include sensemaking.
- **Chapter Three** explores **research methodology**. In order to explain how the research questions were addressed, this comprises an examination of my research philosophy and assumptions, the study design, the methods and techniques of data collection and analysis, and issues of rigour, trustworthiness and ethics.
- **Chapter Four presents, analyses and interprets the data** through a combination of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), cross-case pattern-searching, and iterative identification of themes and concepts, enfolding resources from the literature throughout.
- **Chapter Five makes sense of the data analysis** by reducing, refining, discussing and linking the themes from Chapter Four into a set of theoretical propositions about what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations.
- **Chapter Six** draws **conclusions** and sets out the contribution of the study to cultural management discourse, to perspectives on sensemaking, theatre making and managing, and to learning from organising in theatre. Finally, it sets out the limitations and future implications of the research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first reviews and critiques cultural management literature, to paint a picture of the 'field' and to identify what has been overlooked and what is odd, missing, inaccessible or assumed away. It thus delineates the gap which this study seeks to fill, and provides the rationale for the research questions, which focus on what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations.

The remainder of the chapter moves explicitly into interdisciplinary territory, in that it focuses on bodies of literature which might reasonably be expected to offer a perspective on the research questions and which say something about the theoretical shoulders on which this study rests.

The second part examines theatre and performance studies literature in order to tease out something of the theoretical context in which these managers work and to gain an insight into how cultural management and its practitioners are featured and perceived.

The third part considers some of the ways in which the arts are portrayed in management literature to see what connections there may be between this emerging field of study and those whose daily work I am seeking to examine.

The fourth part explores some of the organisation and management literature which has posed similar questions; contrasts realist and positivist perspectives with those that take a more interpretive and process-orientated approach; and sets out why this study is a multi-faceted sensemaking exercise.

The chapter concludes with a summary and synthesis of the literature reviewed and a reinforcement of the relevance of this research to the cultural management field, to theatre and performance theory and practice, and to organisation and management studies.

## Part 1: Cultural management

...the term 'cultural management' is used to designate a wide set of practices relating to the management of cultural organizations and cultural activities for achieving a variety of aims, including production, distribution, exhibition, education and other related activities within a variety of sectors such as the non-profit, for-profit and public (DeVereaux, 2009, p. 66).

Arts Management (now more frequently referred to as 'cultural management', to denote broader engagement with issues of cultural policy, cultural tourism, heritage, the creative economy and cultural activism, for example) is gaining recognition as a field of enquiry, if not yet a discipline (Evrard & Colbert, 2000; Rentschler & Shilbury, 2008). AIMAC, the international association for arts and cultural management, held its 13th biennial conference in Bogota, Columbia in 2013; the *International* – and peer reviewed – *Journals of Arts Management* and *Cultural Policy* are 16 and 20 years old respectively, while the *Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* and the *Journal of Cultural Economics* supersede them at 45 and 37 years. The newer *Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management* has been published since 2003.

In terms of teaching and learning, The Association of Arts Administration Educators (AAAE) has operated in the US since 1975. Meanwhile, ENCATC (the European network of cultural management education and training centres/providers) was established in 1992, and now has over 100 members from 40 countries. Closer to home, City University – the first British higher education institution (HEI) to offer a formal course in arts administration in 1973 – is now one of 23 UK universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate study opportunities. In addition, there is continuing professional development provision in the shape of initiatives like the Clore Leadership Programme and the £22m Treasury-funded Cultural Leadership Programme 2006-2011, designed to equip managers (and practitioners) for the challenges of cultural and creative industries' work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

North American, Australasian and East and West European writers and teachers/trainers in cultural management operate from a range of perspectives: management theory, sociology, aesthetics, economics, law, cultural studies, cultural policy, and – frequently – what DeVereaux labels “discussions of practice... concerned with utilitarian and action-orientated aims (e.g. how to

write a grant [application], increase audiences, or write a fundraising plan)” (2009, p. 65).

### 1.1 Cultural management: theoretical talk

In reviewing the **theoretical** literature in cultural management which is relevant to this research, it is possible to discern four discrete – though overlapping – strands of talk. These are labelled here as **divide**, **difference**, **deficit** and **dauntlessness**. Each is tackled in turn, with an overall critique at the end.

- **Divide**

The most persistently articulated *divide* in cultural management discourse is between management and the arts, and between arts managers and artists:

When we speak of arts management, we are speaking of management, not art (Bendixen, 2000, p. 4).

Traditionally – and enduringly – the ‘management’ in arts management is seen to comprise the areas of planning, organising, leading and controlling (Byrnes, 2009, p. 6) necessary to ensure that arts organisations remain properly accountable for their use of public funds (UK); are best able to mitigate the evils of mass entertainment (Germany), or can secure a place in an increasingly competitive market (US).

Because the cultural world does not function on an island...cultural managers should be aware of the fundamentals of management theory and translate this knowledge into the cultural sector (Hagoort, 2000, p. xii).

So, the manager takes these ‘fundamentals’ and applies them *to* the arts.

Even those who have attempted to place the ‘arts’ in arts management more centre-stage, ring-fence the manager’s responsibilities quite clearly in terms of the controlling, budgeting, monitoring, safeguarding and sound delivery of artistic products (Pick & Anderton, 1996; Radbourne & Fraser, 1996).

This construction makes a very clear distinction between “the purely administrative functions of an arts organization” and “the management practices involved in producing the artistic work” (Martin, 1998, p. 129), the latter being the exclusive preserve of artists. Indeed, the divide between artists and arts managers is now hard-wired into stereotype:

The mad artist needs the calm bureaucrat and the dualism of uncreative manager/unmanageable creator allows both sides to retreat into their respective comfort zones (Bilton, 2007, pp. 11-12).

Structurally, this divide is most obviously illustrated by the dual leadership structure of many performing arts organisations, comprising both artistic director and executive director, and relations are frequently portrayed in terms of a hierarchical power struggle between the artistic and the managerial.

Professional management governs the process of bringing a product before the public or into the market. This can and often does result in the dominance of management over art (Bendixen, 2000, p. 5).

...leadership is the responsibility of artists, regardless of their hierarchical position...; management on the other hand, is in the service of and subordinate to this ultimate artistic goal (Lapierre, 2001, pp. 1-6).

This arts/management divide is a close relative of that between culture and commerce, derived from the idea of mass entertainment and the culture 'industry' as essentially regressive:

The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment...it impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves (Adorno, 1991, p. 106).

Furthermore, administration assumes the role of necessary evil:

...culture suffers damage when it is planned and administered; when it is left to itself, however, everything cultural threatens not only to lose its possibility of effect, but its very existence as well (p. 108).

Bourdieu similarly pursues the idea of functional separation when he likens publishers and gallery directors to "the merchants in the temple of art" (1996, p. 216, as cited in Kuesters, 2010, p. 44). He sees artists and managers as diametrically opposed to each other, with the latter using an "economic disposition" to exploit the "intellectual disposition" of the former.

The relationship between the arts and the state – with the associated divide between regulation and freedom – is no less problematic; the 'policy turn' in cultural studies (1980s) being a case in point. Its relevance to this study lies in the fact that the research question 'what do cultural managers do?' applies very



specifically to those who manage organisations whose work is largely funded through government subsidy, via Arts Council England and directly from their local authority or authorities. This inevitably connects with cultural policy and the role of cultural manager in relation to it:

Cultural policy... [from a UK perspective, is understood as] the totality of measures adopted by both central and local government to support and regulate the different elements of the [cultural] sector. As such, cultural policy (or its absence) has a significant influence on the production and distribution of words, images and sounds with which we make sense of the world (Bennett, O., 1995, p 18).

For Tony Bennett, a key exponent of the 'policy turn' in cultural studies, culture comprises an historically constructed set of resources, which, within liberal systems of rule, are strategically managed to "act on the social" by "providing a varied set of means through which the freedom which arises from the autonomy of society can be subjected to direction and regulation" (1998, p, 11).

He goes on to argue that if cultural studies aspires to any form of social change, it has to engage with the "different fields of cultural policy debate and formation comprised by the relevant sections of government and by the practices of cultural and media institutions" (p. 34). It therefore has to talk to what Althusser (1969) describes as the ISAs – the Ideological State Apparatuses – and to the "cultural technicians" who work in (and with) them i.e. those:

...intellectual workers [e.g. cultural managers] less committed to cultural critique as an instrument for changing consciousness than to modifying the function of culture by means of technical adjustments to its governmental deployment (Bennett 1992, p. 406).

As McGuigan (1996, p. 5) has observed, however, this has met with strong resistance from some academics in the Cultural Studies field, due, perhaps to "an excessive critical purity and a suspicion of becoming involved in regulatory processes". The idea that Cultural Studies should become 'useful' to policy makers and administrators has been variously attacked as "a sell out to bureaucracy, a sacrifice of critical edge for a complacent managerialism, a Faustian pact with the state or a manifestation of a wish to sit down with...the suits" (Bennett 1998, p. 5). This, Bennett maintains, harks back to the historical

split between critical reason and practical reason (with the former assuming a hierarchically superior position to the latter) and is not unconnected to the tangled antipathy between culture and administration identified above.

There are important assumptions here (again, echoing Adorno, 1991) that critical and reflexive policy analysis cannot co-exist alongside policy formulation and management; and that state purposes and antagonistic purposes must always exist in binary opposition to each other, with the cultural manager of the state-subsidised organisation inevitably orientated towards the first, rather than the second.

The uneasy relationship between the arts and the state *and* culture and commerce takes on a further twist with the advent of the cultural and creative industries in the 1990s and the creative economy in the early years of this century. Whereas the notion of cultural *industry* applied an economic logic to culture “in the sense that it served the external goal of entertaining the masses so that they would reproduce and turn up for work” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979, summarised in Banks & O’Connor, 2009, p. 368), the idea of cultural *industries* tied culture to commerce with a different emphasis. Here the juxtaposition of the words ‘culture’ and ‘industries’ denoted a *sectoral* take on the commercialisation (and frequently mass production of) expressive or symbolic value through film, television, publishing, music, performing arts and video games (The Work Foundation, 2007), and a desire to take “that sector’s economics...and the operation of markets for symbolic goods and services seriously in crafting policy” (Garnham, 2005, p. 19). This shift had the effect of coating arts and media organisations with a layer of political and economic legitimacy they had hitherto been denied, while at the same time highlighting further tensions, for example between the intrinsic and instrumental value of cultural goods, between cultural and economic imperatives, and between the subsidised and the commercial.

The rise of the *creative* industries further harnessed cultural production to economic development in an increasingly competitive globalised and digitally connected world, in a way that purported to collapse the above tensions:

A new term, “creative industries” has emerged...that exploits the fuzziness of the boundaries between “creative arts” and “cultural industries”, freedom and comfort, public and private, state-owned and commercial,

citizen and consumer, the political and the personal... The core of culture [is] still creativity, but creativity [is] produced, deployed, consumed and enjoyed quite differently in post-industrial societies from the way it used to be... (Hartley, 2006, as cited in Holden, 2007, p. 1).

Originally delineated as “those industries that are based on individual creativity, skill and talent... [which] have the potential to create wealth and jobs through developing intellectual property” (DCMS, 1998), the creative industries expanded the remit of the cultural industries to include arts and antiques markets, designer fashion, software and architecture. The most recent research indicates that the ‘creative economy’ makes up one tenth of the whole UK economy, provides work for 2.5 million people (surpassing construction, advance manufacturing and financial services), and is growing at four times the rate of the rest of the workforce (Backshi, Hargreaves, & Mateos-Garcia, 2013, p. 7).

While the definition, benefits and impact of the creative industries remain open to debate, the rhetoric has had far-reaching effects, not least in integrating “creativity (and ‘useful’ forms of culture) into a variety of economic and social policy initiatives” (Banks & O’Connor, 2009, p. 365) at the local, regional, national and international levels. Cultural managers are increasingly well-versed in the contribution of their organisations to areas such as the local economy, city regeneration and branding, cultural tourism, health and wellbeing, community safety, education and life-long learning. They can talk persuasively about a symbiotic relationship between the *subsidised* and the *commercial* within the context of a rapid growth in *social* (digital) production, such that creative production now navigates three rather than two territories (Holden, 2007). All of this is an important part of the context in which cultural managers work, and yet the resultant ecology remains suffused with division and paradox. Despite the ostensible success of the creative industries, those (predominantly micro-) enterprises that comprise the majority can be found wanting because they do not conform to conventional business models and patterns of development. Furthermore, “while creative workers tend to see their lives as integrated, policy tends to divide their activities” (p. 28), thus ignoring the very particular balancing act involved in commercialising expressive value (an issue which is explored in more detail in the next section). Once again, arts and

commerce make uneasy bedfellows and the match between culture and economics remains a fractious one. Moreover, behind the lure of creativity as the prime driver of our economy is the lurking fear that instrumentalism and exploitation are not far behind: those who live by economic (and other instrumental) arguments for the arts might very well die by them too.

The divides of arts/management, artists/managers, culture/commerce and freedom/regulation suffuse cultural management discourse. Correspondingly, the literature depicts the cultural manager's role in terms of "border crossings" (Foehl, 2008), "bilingualism" (Bendixen, 2000), even a "Janus syndrome", with the cultural manager "looking toward managerial and economic realities but primarily focusing on the arts" (Brkic, 2009, p. 270). The cultural manager's role, it would seem, is mainly about bridging these divides.

- ***Difference***

A second strand of discourse focuses on *difference* rather than divide, with difference referring to the 'thing' being managed and the peculiarity of associated structures, practices and relationships; in other words, context.

In contrast to those who think that cultural management is simply the application of the five traditional management functions to the arts, there are those who maintain that context adds a particularity to their enactment, such that "arts administration...is quite different from business administration" (Clancy, 1994, pp. 1-2).

In the arts, there is no simple 'bottom line', but a diversity of interests and constituencies to serve. Businesses may have multiple stakeholders, but they are not expected to meet the requirements of social policies imposed by funders, as appears to be increasingly the case in the arts. Conditions of law and governance are different from those in business. Cultural sector leaders are required to manage with scarce resources, and make strategic plans in the absence of long-term financial security. They are likely to use unpaid volunteers, either as board members or as key personnel. They are under steady pressure to complete short-term projects while at the same time ensuring constant innovation (Hewison & Holden, 2002, p. 4).

The differences most often cited alternate between the internal (working with artists) and the external (the nature of the product and the issues inherent in its mediation to the public). Demand – it is argued – is much more challenging to predict for cultural goods and services than for those with more functional content; it is difficult to know in advance what a consumer or audience member is going to get (in terms of ‘reward’) from, say, a performance, because the experience is not material (in the sense that a bag of compost might be); it is social, personal and often subject to the vagaries of word of mouth (The Work Foundation, 2007, p. 20). Marketing in the arts tends to be product-led, in that an audience is sought for a particular piece, rather than the piece being created for a particular audience. And if that weren’t enough, there are the management challenges of having to deal with the wayward, individualistic ‘creatives’ who need to be corralled into effective teams (p. 20).

The literature explores how these differences can be integrated into work areas such as audience development; PR; management of people and place; strategic planning; leadership; fundraising and financial control; stakeholder and board relations (Chong, 2002, 2010; Hagoort, 2000; Hewison & Holden, 2002, 2011; Hill et al., 1995; Pick & Anderton, 1996, 1999; Radbourne & Fraser, 1996; Palmer, 1998) without necessarily moving too far outside the classical management perspectives that originated with Taylor (1911) and Fayol (1949 [1916]).

‘Difference’ is also reflected in the diversity of the discipline, making it difficult to clarify or place it, or to come up with a single coherent definition (Devereaux, 2009) of an emergent field that “straddles, sometimes uncomfortably, the boundaries between the social sciences, the humanities, management and the arts” (p. 66).

We must admit that the knowledge base of the field is still unclear – ...maybe not even existing as such, rather hiding under the veil of multi-disciplinarity (Chong, 2002 as cited in Brkic, 2009, p. 271).

Colbert (2011, p. 261) goes so far as to argue that “arts and cultural management is hampered by a twofold legitimacy problem. On the one hand, it is viewed with suspicion by the arts world, and, on the other, it is often taken less seriously by management scholars”. As a consequence, much cultural management research has been an attempt to mitigate the legitimacy issue –

with a particular emphasis on gaining credibility with the latter constituency (Evrard & Colbert, 2000; Rentschler & Shilbury, 2008).

Finally, others reflect on 'difference' in the variety of European, North American and international conceptions of the 'field' (Suteu, 2006), as manifested by contrasting approaches to curriculum design, which draw variously from business management, from cultural management interwoven with cultural policy, or from entrepreneurship intermingled with creativity and innovation (Brkic, 2009, p. 290).

On the one hand, the areas of difference highlighted in this second strand reconfigure cultural management in order to highlight the situational and contextual factors that make it a discrete profession and a specific sub-set of management. Here the cultural manager's job is to overlay the traditional tools and functions of management with "social competence, cultural imagination and knowledge of the arts" (Bendixen, 2000, p. 8). On the other hand, while the cultural manager – by these means – may be better able to bridge the divides referred to earlier, the hybridity of this approach can lead to its dismissal as 'management-lite' within the broader management and policy-making fields. Furthermore, the notion of difference only goes so far, implying that:

...it is sufficient to apply and refine received managerial wisdom, specifying how arts organisations ought to operate rather than capturing the reality of how they actually work. (Beirne & Knight, 2002a, p. 77).

- ***Deficit***

An accompanying and prevailing sense of *deficit* is discernible in writing about cultural management both as a discipline *and* in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of cultural managers themselves (particularly in relation to their ability to deliver on the economic growth agenda).

In comparison to a field like cultural studies, cultural management does not exhibit the same intellectual interest in moral, epistemological, or sociological reflection on the relevance of power relationships or the conceptual underpinnings of principles. Questions of political or economic import are often limited to those that fall neatly within the applied realm (DeVereaux, 2009, p. 68).

I have often been struck by... arts and cultural management students' lack of contact with and knowledge of some of the basic landmarks and thinkers of cultural theory and history... (Mercer, in Suteu, 2006, pp. 7-8).

In many cases, there is no shortage of individuals with drive and creative talent [across the cultural and creative industries]. There is however, a lack of understanding surrounding the need for strong management and leadership skills, particularly in small organisations ([www.ccskills.org.uk](http://www.ccskills.org.uk) – accessed 16 June 2009).

The first two notions of deficit have affected the identity and status of cultural management as an area of study and the third (in the UK at least) has led to a raft of development initiatives designed to ensure that arts organisations are 'properly' prepared for current and anticipated challenges in the cultural and creative industries as they move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The development of 'cultural leadership' is a case in point.

Kay (2010) notes that around the turn of the millennium, a series of crises in national flagship institutions (the Royal Opera House, the Royal Shakespeare Company, English National Opera and the British Museum); difficulties in recruiting to senior positions, and a number of critical reports (Boyden, 2000; Holland, 1998; Metier, 2000; Resource, 2001) led to the conclusion that there was a "crisis of cultural leadership [across the sector]" (Hewison & Holden, 2002), characterised by apathy and a general lack of aspiration. This was "explained in terms of low morale produced by government underfunding, low pay, loss of status, ill-defined career paths and over-regulation..." and compounded by "the collapse of a hierarchic model of cultural values" (Hewison, 2004, p. 164). This apparent crisis also mirrored concerns about leadership quality across the public and private sectors as a whole, and was reflected in a number of concurrent studies (DfES, 2002; Institute of Management/Demos, 2001).

In addition, there was – in response – a perceived need to improve management and leadership skills across the sector (i.e. to 'fix' the leaders – Ely, 2007, p. 154), in order to strengthen the contribution of the creative and cultural industries to the national economy, and to prepare for an anticipated growth in the sector's workforce.

This interest in cultural leadership was reflected in the establishment of the Clore Leadership Programme; the roll-out of an ongoing research project under the Mission Models Money umbrella; the advent of new postgraduate courses at two English universities, and in 2006, the launch of the national Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP). Funded initially by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, to “hone the leadership skills of talented high flyers in cultural organisations... [and to] promote the emergence of a more diverse group of cultural leaders’ (Arts Council England, 2006, p. 5), CLP was granted a further resourcing (2008-2011) to:

...promote excellence in leadership across the creative and cultural industries by supporting an ambitious range of activities, opportunities and resources... to nurture and develop emerging to established world class, dynamic and diverse leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
([www.culturalleadership.org.uk](http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk)).

Within a short space of time (2002–2011) then, ‘cultural leadership’ became a significant focus for policy intervention and government spending (Arts Council England, 2006; Devlin, Carty & Turner, 2008), and – by extension – for the improvement of cultural managers, cultural organisations and the sector as a whole, as several thousand cultural sector workers delivered and experienced the resultant array of exploratory opportunities and leadership development initiatives.

This deficit strand – the idea that cultural managers are in need of constant development and improvement (with a side-order of never being quite good enough and an ever-present risk of overload) – has gained strength as the cultural sector has initiated, welcomed, absorbed and been affected by changing labels, circumstances and expectations (Hewison, 2004; Leadbeater, 2005a; Creative & Cultural Skills, 2008).

Further impetus has been added as a result of the economic downturn, which simultaneously puts the sector at particular *risk* “because it creates wealth from ideas and newness rather than pledgeable assets and well-tried formulas” *and*, it is asserted, puts it in pole position to help create the necessary new paradigm “that [will] carry us from our current malaise to a solid and sustainable prosperity” (Holden et al., 2009).



- ***Dauntlessness***

Finally, Holden et al.'s mention of a new paradigm leads on to a more recent theme in cultural management discourse; that of *dauntlessness* in the face of significant cultural change.

We are living through a time of fundamental cultural transformation. Familiar cultural and social norms are in flux. This is not only an age of change but a change of age... In order to thrive in this challenging environment, we need to develop a higher tolerance for...uncertainty and not knowing...The most promising settings to gain such experience are in the arts and cultural sector (Leicester, 2007, p. 3).

This cultural change has many aspects, including:

- the creative and collaborative potential of digital technology;
- the shift from *provision of culture* to *participation in* and making of culture – the art of “with” rather than “to” or “for” (Leadbeater, 2009);
- the importance of “personalisation” – the desire of consumers “to tailor their experience and co-produce creative products” (Knell, 2006, p. 9);
- the impact of globalisation on our sense of self and community, and
- the emergence of migration, global recession and climate change as the overarching issues of our times.

These, it is argued (Hewison, 2006; Holden, 2006; Jones, 2009; Leadbeater, 2009) call into question:

- the future role of cultural institutions;
- the viability and relevance of established cultural practices;
- traditional notions of authority and expertise;
- closed, top-down models of organisation;
- the adequacy of the language and concepts we use to encapsulate 21<sup>st</sup> century “cultural value” (see below), and
- the future purpose of public funding for culture – particularly post-recession.

Furthermore, it is suggested that in this new “participative” world, cultural management not only refers to the stewardship of practices, organisations or domains, but is also about advocating for a “vibrant expressive life” as a public

good within a democracy (Ivey, 2009), with radical implications for cultural policy formation:

Cultural leadership now occupies a terrain that helps bring about the marriage of cultural and political change (Palmer, 2009, p. 28).

The role of the cultural manager in respect of the “public good” is clearly reflected in recent and ongoing debates about “cultural value”. Holden (2006) asserts that the cultural system faces a crisis of legitimacy as evidenced by funding cuts and reports of individual organisations that “continue to stagger from one damning headline to the next” (p. 9). He argues that publicly funded culture generates three types of cultural value (intrinsic, instrumental and institutional), which are created and consumed within a triangular relationship between cultural professionals, politicians and policy makers, and the public. There is a problem, however, in that while “politicians and policy-makers appear to care most about instrumental economic and social outcomes... the public and most professionals have a completely different set of concerns” (p. 10) as a result of which, the relationship between all three has become seriously dysfunctional. In his view, the solution to this systemic problem could and should start with the cultural professionals (i.e. cultural managers) who, he argues, are best placed to “create a different alignment between culture, politics and the public... and [to find] new ways to build greater legitimacy directly with citizens” (p. 10).

While this analysis has received criticism from some quarters as being too closely allied with an advocacy agenda (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010), the whole issue of cultural value continues to generate interest and debate (for example through the AHRC Cultural Value Project 2013-2015). What is of note here, is the perceptual shift from the cultural manager as deficient, to the cultural manager as a (potential) strategic change agent, which also chimes with Leicester’s reframing of cultural leadership at a time of extraordinary global upheaval.

Leicester argues that in this period of cultural crisis, the cultural sector (which is in the business of making meaning) has a leadership role to play through the provision of three resources (2007, pp. 12-13):

- *21<sup>st</sup> century people* (because the arts are a natural medium for the development of the qualities and the consciousness we need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century);
- *Creative adhocracies* (because cultural organisations are “promising candidates” for providing settings which are loose, flexible, adaptive and fragile enough for people to grow and develop this new consciousness);
- *Real cultural leadership* (because the real task of leadership in powerful times is to “help evolve the culture” through “hospice” support for a dying culture and “midwifery” support for the new).

Caution must be exercised, however, in considering the more practical implications of this. First there is the assumption that all arts organisations (and cultural managers) operate at this cutting edge, when in reality the picture is much more mixed. Second, there is the risk of cloaking the sector in abstract and heroic separateness that – while appealing as an antidote to deficit – is difficult to ground in terms of day-to-day activity. And third, while cultural organisations and their managers have no difficulty in ascribing transformational power to arts work, they rarely apply it to the ways in which they organise and manage themselves, which are often described in a much more hesitant and diffident manner (Beirne & Knight, 2002a). A gap therefore emerges between an advocacy-inspired rhetoric on the one hand and the situated reality of cultural managers on the other.

Other writers have nevertheless made follow-on attempts to frame cultural management activity more pragmatically according to this emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century landscape. The notion of ‘resilience’ has now entered the cultural management lexicon in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 and the ongoing UK recession and squeeze on public sector expenditure (Robinson, 2010). Likewise Dods and Andrews (2010) talk of “thriving”, which they define as “adapting to changing conditions in a life-friendly way to people and planet in order to maintain the function of making great work happen”. These are discussed in more detail later.

Holden et al. (2009) make it clear that in the middle of a recession the last thing we should be doing is following the old rules; instead the time is right to shape a new topography in and for the creative economy. The collection of essays that comprises *After the Crunch*, updated in 2013 (Wright et al.), makes a clarion

call for new business models and new finance models, increased collaboration and partnership, better information provision and increased diversity within the cultural and creative sector as necessary ways forward.

Within this context, a spotlight is now focused on the viability of late-stage capitalist notions of growth and what can be learned from the “Cinderella economy” (Jackson, 2009) and the working practices of micro-scale cultural and creative enterprises (Dods, 2014; Kaiser, 2011). Beyond “integrity to people, planet, product and everything else in the business” (Dods, 2014), it is as yet unclear what these practices are and how they are enacted, particularly from a management perspective. Nevertheless, increased understanding in this area – it can be argued – is vital, not only for the economy at large, but also for cultural policy makers, funding agencies and those creative micro-enterprises themselves, if they are to make sense of, and navigate, this post-crunch world. Small and frugal would appear to have renewed significance in these changing times (Leadbeater, 2014).

What, then, do these four theoretical strands of talk (divide, difference, deficit and dauntlessness) suggest about cultural management and (by implication) what cultural managers do?

In many ways, notions of *divide* (arts/management, artist/manager, culture/commerce and freedom/regulation) form the foundation of cultural management discourse. The first two are presented as essentialist dualisms which it is the cultural manager’s job to bridge (for the benefit of audiences), whilst being regarded with perennial suspicion by the artists with whom she works. The third and fourth are political and theoretical hurdles to be approached with extreme caution if serious injury is to be avoided.

The areas of *difference* highlighted in the second strand, point up the perceived distinctiveness of cultural management as an emerging field and profession. Here the cultural manager deploys the traditional tools and functions of management with an awareness of the particularities of working in the arts. That said, while these areas of difference don’t move cultural management too far off the slopes of received managerial wisdom, they are sufficiently off-piste to raise questions of legitimacy, seriousness and robustness.

The third and fourth strands of *deficit* and *dauntlessness* merely compound the problem, rather like Dr Doolittle's pushmi-pullyu, the gazelle-unicorn cross with a head at opposite ends of its body. At one extreme the cultural manager is constantly faced with the requirement to catch up with the skills she is told she needs to be 'properly' competent, while at the other she is deemed to be at the forefront of significant social, cultural, economic and environmental change, without necessarily knowing how to enact that on Monday morning.

The emphasis throughout is on what the cultural manager doesn't, could or should do, rather than on what she does.

## 1.2 Cultural management: empirical talk

The traffic is not all one way, though, and those who counter "the widely shared and rarely challenged certainty about the practice [of cultural management] itself" (Kuesters, 2010, p. 43) take a different view. They are more concerned to break down (rather than simply bridge) perceived divides; celebrate, interrogate and build on difference; challenge notions of deficit through active resistance to rationalistic models and encroaching managerialism (Protheroe & Pick, 2002); and ground incursions into *dauntlessness*.

These writers either call for, or base their writing on, empirical (and specifically interview-based) research:

Empirical research data reveals that the assumption of a separation into functional areas and of a complete non-involvement of arts managers in artistic matters is strongly contradicted by the practitioners themselves when describing their actual practice (Kuesters, 2010, p. 46).

...if frames of reference are shifted – moving closer the actual experience of the professional in the field..., a new range of potential activities and interventions is revealed (Summerton, Kay & Hutchins, 2006, pp. 1-2).

So, what do these writers say about 'what cultural managers do'? The key themes to emerge here are **invisibility**, **informality** and **isomorphism**.

- ***Invisibility***

Summerton's research (1996) suggests that the dominance – in cultural management literature – of models derived from large scale arts organisations has had the effect of eclipsing and downgrading small scale management

activity in the arts. She argues that the assumption that small scale enterprise is simply a miniature version of the large, or a breeding ground/initial stage in the inevitable growth from small to large, sets inappropriate norms and expectations. This can all too readily lead to the suggestion that small equates with inefficient, inferior, even “amateur” (p. 7 and Storey, 1994). Furthermore, such large-scale-informed thinking can constrain what “quality management” might be taken to mean (Summerton & Kay, 1999) since, for example, it:

- sets up salaried employment as the norm, and diminishes the place and value of voluntary or unpaid involvement (common in cultural organisations);
- sidelines important shared, cooperative management activity;
- ignores the competence of the largely invisible management which is practised singly and in groups by many in the service of their artistic ambitions;
- encourages an unhelpful demarcation of boundaries within, around and between organisations operating in the field;
- does not adequately reflect the range, dynamism, fluidity, flexibility and indeed, inventiveness of working practices in the arts.

The argument thus runs that cultural management activity in micro-enterprises is largely “hidden from view” both empirically and theoretically, and is sidelined as a result. This takes on further resonance when considering that 85% of the UK’s 59,561 creative and cultural businesses (and 88% of the 10,123 organisations working in the performing arts), employ fewer than five people (Creative & Cultural Skills, 2012); the vast majority, therefore, operating at a micro-scale. Summerton consequently proposes that:

It is imperative that we consider the evidence from the field as valid material to develop models of the small enterprise which often chooses to remain small, is often not a recognisable or rigid organisation or hierarchically managed, [and] yet may be fairly stable and long-lasting with management and organisation appropriate to its own purposes (Summerton, 1996, p. 7).

Bilton (2006, pp. 4 &10) similarly contends that management in small creative organisations:

...is actually far more sophisticated than its detractors and would-be improvers assume... [having] evolved its own autonomous tradition [based on entrepreneurship, self-management, multi-tasking...and an economy of mixed motives] which does not conform to best practice models imposed by well-intentioned policy makers.

Such writers are united in their rejection of the “inappropriate yardsticks” that can overshadow and undermine home grown good practice in the sector. Their voices do not necessarily influence cultural policy decisions, however, and top-down interventions to ‘improve’ arts management and leadership according to the model of the large scale, hierarchical and bureaucratic private sector organisation (or its not-for-profit counterpart with a “disinterested” board of directors) still prevail (Summerton & Kay, 1999).

Little has been written by people who manage arts activity (at anything other than mid to large scale) and their role is sparingly acknowledged in programmes, catalogues and other publications (Summerton & Hutchins, 2005). They rarely record their own experiences or analyse their working practices, which one manager (Jodi Myers) suggests leads to a kind of “corporate amnesia” (Hutchins et al., 2007, p. 40).

There is...a dearth of research detail on how they actually conduct their work. Their sense of practice, of how values can be enacted, is locked into experiential insights that are shared within the profession and through collective discussion rather than written forms of communication (Beirne & Knight, 2004, p. 37).

Even when asked about their day to day activities, cultural managers have a tendency to sidestep a definitive reply:

In the research discussion days, there were very few direct responses to the question ‘what do you actually do?’ ...people concentrated on aspects they found most interesting and their relationship to the artistic product, rather than their work itself (Hutchins et al, 2007, p. 14).

Responses to interview questions about established ways of doing things were frequently hesitant, as if a rationale was being found or incubated during the discussions (Beirne & Knight, 2002a, p. 83).

This reluctance is accounted for in a number of ways. Tyndall (2007, p. 2) observes that cultural managers and producers actually prefer to stay out of the limelight, expressing “bemused surprise” when attention is focused on them.

Summerton et al., (2006) suggest that what cultural managers do is often practised unconsciously, and is characterised by intense activity and multiple deadlines which leave them little time for reflection. Moreover, it has now become a habit for cultural managers to seek legitimacy from outside and to fail to value or even recognise the skills and knowledge they have (often informally) accumulated inside (Dods & Andrews, 2010). This can leave individuals apologetic and self-deprecating about what they do and unable to recognise “managerial value that can be drawn from their own traditions” (Beirne & Knight, 2002a, p. 75).

Finally, Hutchins et al. note that the invisibility of producer and manager roles in theatre and dance can have an impact on how well their work is understood and respected by others in their own organisations (2007, p. 18). Operating out of the spotlight might seem preferable to them as a *modus operandi*, but this lack of visibility can lead others to ignore, belittle or misunderstand their work: divide and deficit, it would appear, are never far away.

- **Informality** (flexibility and fun)

There is a marked emphasis on informality in the empirical literature about cultural management. This (as noted by Fitzgibbon, 2001 in her study of innovation in three Irish theatre companies), has parallels with features of organic organisations which include “intense communications and interactions, mutual adjustment, flexibility, informality and integration” together with “high commitment and value orientation, loosely defined jobs, and a soft (predominantly cultural) control system” (p. 35).

Cultural managers’ job descriptions, it is reported, are often non-existent or completely outdated (Hutchins et al., 2007, p. 14), with jobs growing incrementally around an individual’s skills and interests (p. 15). Interestingly the opportunity to make your own job is regarded by some as an explicit challenge to accepted norms, and successful management is deemed to reside in “*just enough* structure and organisation to facilitate and enhance the joint efforts of



people towards achieving the [organisation's] primary purpose" (Summerton, 1996, p. 10, italics added).

Cultural managers' learning too is seen to happen in an experiential and largely non-formal or informal way, with skills, knowledge and experience acquired through trial and error; observing/networking with/operating alongside others; coaching and informal mentoring; and "sheep dip" courses (preferences that have been borne out in evaluations of more recent CPD schemes e.g. Kay, 2011).

This, it is noted, means that skills and expertise obtained informally can paradoxically compound a prevailing sense of invisibility and lack of legitimacy:

...if learning is primarily from experience, the knowledge and skills are not as clearly identified and labelled as is possible in more formal situations such as through a classic MBA (Summerton, 1996, p. 9).

Hutchins et al. observe that a pride in, and preference for, learning by doing is seen as part of self-identification as an "outsider manager" – "someone who could be more effective *precisely because* she or he operated outside and was therefore 'untainted' by the conventional wisdom of established management theories and teaching" (2007, p. 40, italics added).

Beirne and Knight (2004, p. 42) describe the community theatre workers and managers they observed as "purposeful creators" (rather than simply 'users') of management ideas, with each organisation having to "negotiate their own pattern of interactions and achievements, adapting to events, improvising and responding flexibly to the reaction, view, feeling and interpretations that influence collaborative working" (p. 37), so informal here is not taken to mean haphazard or laissez-faire.

Cultural managers' career development is often depicted in informal terms too (in contrast to those who advocate more formal progression routes within the field e.g. Hewison, 2004). There is talk of zig-zagging or meandering, finding work opportunities by accident, and spotting something that looked interesting and then going for it. Data from interviews suggest that this progression is akin to carrying a compass rather than working from a map (Hutchins et al., 2007, pp. 33-34) and is often enacted over long periods of time (Tyndall, 2007, p. 2).

Reported features of these informal trajectories include: a willingness or requirement to multi-task; working with inspirational people along the way; building up a network of contacts within and connected to their field; being personally and professionally entrepreneurial; and a gradual realisation that being in the thick of it and making stuff happen could be a multi-faceted job in its own right (Hutchins et al., 2007, pp. 34-35).

Informal behaviour as part of the culture of theatre organisations has also been a focus for empirical research (Beirne & Knight, 2002a; Lyon, 1974; Morency & Needles, 1998) and there are comparisons here with explorations of third sector organisations more broadly.

For Hudson (1995) informality is inextricably tied up with the values and comparative self-determination of voluntary organisations (in which he includes subsidised arts groups). This means lots of talk, involving diverse stakeholders and constituencies – including volunteers, workers, managers and board members – because these organisations “rely more heavily on internal negotiation to agree priorities...developing [their] own criteria for allocating resources that suit [their] circumstances at a particular time” (p. 37). Such organisations, suggests Hudson, are therefore inevitably full of contradictions, complexity, ambiguities and mess (p. 15); as exemplified by “the symbols of informal dress, cramped offices and seemingly endless meetings” (p. 33-34).

Lyon (1974), in her study of theatre collectives, maintains that lack of resourcing necessitates long hours of commitment, which in turn require the group or organisation to supply many elements of the social life which is compromised as a result – fun being a key component (p. 84).

Beirne and Knight go further, seeing informality, ad hoc activity and “muddling through” as *pre-requisites* for getting the work done in ways that actively enhanced the results.

Progress was crucially dependent upon informal patterns of behaviour and the voluntary commitment that staff brought to their work. Flexible employees were building informal ties and collaborative arrangements to ensure the necessary tasks were covered... [and] [s]uccessful outcomes were directly correlated with fluid working across formal boundaries and job descriptions... (2002a, pp. 83-84).

For Morency and Needles, in their analysis of the structure and management practices of Cirque du Soleil, this extends to involving as many people as possible in resolving production dilemmas as they occur.

This ensures that everyone is aware of the problems and the successes surrounding them, and knows that they can be part of the method of finding solutions to any problems, which ultimately enriches the planning procedure (Morency & Needles, 1998, pp. 65-66 and 68).

It is almost as if they see ongoing (and largely informal) talk in and across the “village community” (which is how they characterise the generators and deliverers of each production) as a proxy or substitute for more formal hierarchical structure and organisation.

Informality, flexibility and fun, then, are seen to have a serious purpose and, it could be argued, are important aspects of the day-to-day ‘culture’ of cultural organisations - something that Bilton attests (2006, p. 2) has received surprisingly little attention.

- ***Isomorphism***

It is through the theme of isomorphism that empirical research most explicitly challenges the discourse of division between artists and managers/art and management. Isomorphisms are studied in mathematics in order to extend insights from one phenomenon to others, so that properties in one object are true of another. In the same way, institutional isomorphism – as identified by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) – refers to the ways in which organizations seek to mimic each other (Helmig, Jegers & Lapsley, 2004, p. 105). Here I borrow the term to try and make sense of the ways in which insights and properties from one area of activity (the work of artists) might be mimicked by, or be depicted as ‘true’ of another (cultural managers).

Kuesters (2010) takes issue with the perception that arts managers are simply “financial caretakers in the realm of the arts and dutiful, but artistically uninvolved, enablers of artists and the arts”, arguing that this “gives only a vague notion of what arts managers actually do and...misapprehends their functions and practices in several ways” (p. 43).

Having interviewed a range of music managers, during which they give examples of ways in which they engage directly with the art (e.g. creating

seasonal themes, choosing the repertoire for each concert, commissioning new work and selecting the artists who will perform), she concludes that

Arts managers conduct a constant and very subtle alternation between financial and artistic orientations and requirements [even to the point of functionally amalgamating them]. One main goal coordinates this constant switching – securing the further existence and financial welfare of their arts institutions (p. 55).

While amalgamation does not equate with isomorphism, Kuesters is nevertheless suggesting that aesthetic and managerial sensibilities can and do co-exist within the cultural manager's work, and that one is necessary to feed the other.

Recent empirical studies of dual leadership within performing arts organisations have likewise become more nuanced (Caust, 2005, 2010; Cray, Inglis & Freeman, 2007; Reid, 2013; Reid & Karambayya, 2009), with an increased emphasis on successful examples of shared responsibility. MacNeill, Tonks and Reynolds (2012) conducted interviews with the general managers and artistic directors of six Australian theatre companies. The study concluded that their co-leadership relationships reflected all four facets of "authentic leadership" i.e. self-awareness; balanced processing of information; relational transparency and an internalised moral perspective (demonstrating the importance of shared values and a shared commitment to the art). In this sense, then, their co-leadership can be characterised as a duality (two sides of the same thing), rather than a dualism (two different things), thus countering the inevitability of divide between the two.

Beirne and Knight take things up a notch, asserting that

...exchanges between management and the arts can usefully be developed in a two-way rather than a predominantly passive or one-way fashion, with arts organisations drawing managerial value more directly from their own traditions and creative practices (2004, p. 33).

They see similarities between "reflective art" (the responsibility of community theatre directors and artists) and the idea of anti-managerialist "self-conscious, reflective and interpretive management" (Beirne & Knight, 2002a: 78). Here, they draw on similarities with Schon's (1983) "reflection-in-action" where

professionals draw on repertoires of established knowledge which they apply, appraise and develop in the context of unique situations. Beirne and Knight make a distinction, however, between individuals having an internal conversation about a particular situation in order to control events, and the kind of sensemaking they see community theatre workers engaging in, which is more "connected to artistic principles and collective engagement and how unfolding events stack up against them" (2002b, pp. 7-8). They also observe instances where managers share a collective identity with their artists:

In other words, they display an attachment to the arts and a commitment to the core principles of the employing organisation that affects the conduct of their work (2002a, p. 77).

Recent work by Bilton (2007) explores the relationship between the management of creativity and creative approaches to management within the creative industries. He challenges the binary division between "creatives" and "suits", arguing that creativity "depends on a contradictory capacity to encompass different ways of thinking" with the emphasis on problem "finding" rather than problem "solving" (p. 173). Within this broader frame he argues that "creative artists are far better managers than they care to admit, so too managers are required to be creative".

Bilton and Leary (2002) reject the idea of a divide between creatives and managers, and they too talk of a duality. They argue that it is "the myth of genius... which has led to a separation of "creative" and "managerial" functions within organisations and a stereotypical and limiting view of both" (Bilton & Leary, 2002, p. 50). Their alternative configuration rests on "a process-based view of creativity where the key lies not in the individual components (rational vs. irrational, divergent vs. convergent, genius vs. non genius) but in the totality of relationships between them" (p. 56).

Nevertheless, it is noticeable that for Bilton, the roles of creatives and managers within this totality do not stray too far outside the stereotype, in that the former are free to engage in improvisational activity ("as soon as something appears to be winding down, it opens up a new set of possible interventions and beginnings"), while the latter manage the process and sets "strategic targets", constraints and boundaries, to ensure the work gets done (2007, pp 86-87). It is in this sense that Bilton and Leary assert that successful cultural managers are

“creativity brokers”, who “add value to the creative process by directing the traffic of ideas and resources, and by “matching” ideas, individuals and organisational tasks” (Bilton & Leary, 2002, p. 63).

This idea of mixing and matching is also picked up in recent work on the role of the creative producer in dance, theatre and film. Whether she is the CEO of an established organisation or the head of a project team, it is the producer who brings together the internal and external worlds of the project (Tyndall, 2007):

As a producer I work in-between: between artists and audiences, between venues and artists, between one approach and another. It might mean giving feedback in rehearsals, devising a programme, or chucking in an idea from left of field to shake things up a bit (Tanuja Amarasuriya, in Hutchins et al., 2007, p. 30).

Here rather than the artist and manager lining up on opposite sides of a divide, the relationship is depicted more as a valued partnership, with the producer/manager as “sounding board...coach...mentor...editor...tak[ing] responsibility for marshalling resources (broadly defined) around a creative idea” (O’Hara & Leicester, 2012, p. 114).

Not that the clarity – or legitimacy – of this portrait is necessarily recognised by managers/producers themselves:

The ongoing mystery of my working life is why someone doesn’t tap me on the shoulder and ask me to sit down. ‘Excuse me mate, you’re just making it up as you go along aren’t you?’ ‘Er, yes, sorry’ (David Jubb, in Tyndall, 2007, p. 31).

### **Conclusion to Part 1**

These three strands of empirical talk about cultural management (invisibility, informality and isomorphism) provide a useful counterpoint to the theoretical strands (divide, difference, deficit and dauntlessness) explored earlier. Here there is *invisibility* in terms of scale, diffidence in the face of external ideas about what cultural managers should be doing, and a sense that there may be more going on than generally meets the (academic or policy making) eye. There is a marked *informality* which seems to suffuse day-to-day life in their organisations, their own ways of learning and their career trajectories, with talk and conversation a constant feature. There are signs of quasi-*isomorphic*

creative exchanges, partnerships and subtle border crossings with the artists (and others) with whom they work. Above all, existing empirical research adds an element of fun to the endeavour, which the theoretical strands singularly lack.

And yet, while the three 'I's begin to uncover something of the 'what' that cultural managers do (as opposed to what they should, could or don't do), there is still a lack of specificity. Furthermore, there is little exploration of the 'how' that goes with the 'what' (particularly that which involves working closely with others). Above all, with the very few exceptions already mentioned, the voice of the cultural manager (aside from those well known in the field) is largely unheard, *particularly* – as indicated – when her working environment is micro-scale. Thus, the situated activity of management, “the scene of everyday action” (Chia, 2004, p. 30) and the interactions of the people engaged in it seem curiously elliptical, even absent. What is not yet advanced is any sense of how cultural managers – with others – “get on” with (Chia & Holt, 2006, p. 647), “construct” and “make sense of” the doing of cultural management in their particular contexts. I would therefore argue that an important perspective is missing from the conversation.

Across [the cultural management] field there is considerable competence and expertise. There are logics and coherence as well as observable patterns. But we have not yet had the time, inclination or the opportunity to shift this wisdom from its primarily tacit, unwritten or unarticulated state (Summerton, 2010, p. 118).

This study is an effort to redress the balance (in the company of those other empirical enquirers), to move from the tacit to the manifest, the unwritten to the documented and the unarticulated to the expressed. It will do this by taking a closer look at cultural managers and their daily doings.

### **1.3 The research questions**

To narrow things down still further, this research focuses on micro-scale *theatre* organisations in South West England.

There are several reasons for this. First, my own professional background is in contemporary theatre and performance, so this is a domain I am familiar with and have access to. Second, I live and work in the South West which (aside

from *not* being London – and according to Creative & Cultural Skills (2012), 69% of the UK’s cultural organisations are located outside the capital) has a varied theatre ecology comprising rural and urban, and touring and building-based work, so some degree of diversity is assured. Third, subsidised theatre at the micro-scale has a disproportionate impact on artistic development (Arts Council England, 2011) and on the work of larger scale and commercial theatre, while at the same time being obliged to develop robust systems of accountability and therefore being a site for the adoption of business skills and management techniques (Beirne & Knight, 2002a). Fourth, as workers in “tents” rather than “palaces” (Anheier, 2000, as cited in Summerton, 2010, p. 116) these cultural managers are less likely to work to the kind of bureaucratic and hierarchical structure/methods adopted by many larger scale organisations, so alternative and more informal shared practices may well come to the fore.

The research questions are as follows:

- *What* do cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations (in South West England)?
- *Why* do they do what they do?
- *How* do they do what they do?
- In what ways might an analysis of what they do *inform* talk in and about cultural management?
- To what other theoretical conversations might such an analysis *contribute*?

Thus, the purpose of this enquiry is to challenge and add a further dimension to the cultural management field (scholars and practitioners) through an empirical exploration of what cultural managers do in a particular domain (theatre) and scale of organisation (micro-) within the (subsidised) cultural sector.

The remainder of the literature review explores and critiques sources which might – reasonably – be assumed to offer a useful perspective on these research questions: theatre-making and theatre management (Part 2); management and the arts – ‘the art of...’ strand of management studies (Part 3); and other relevant aspects of management and organisation studies, beginning with those writers who have posed similar questions to those asked here,



before leading into a discussion of the theoretical perspective which informs the rest of this study (Part 4).

## **Part 2: Theatre and performance studies**

As this study concerns what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations, it is appropriate to look at a) how their work might be depicted and described in theatre literature over a similar 50 year timeframe, and b) how a changing theatre context – particularly at the micro-scale – might have impacted on ‘what they do’.

### **2.1 Drama, theatre and performance studies**

The ‘subject’ of drama, theatre and performance has undergone significant development in the past half century. Mangan (2013, p. 12-13) identifies four “strands” – some or all of which may make up a higher education course.

The “drama” strand (in the UK from the late 1940s) focuses on the study of dramatic texts within their social, cultural and historical contexts (p. 12).

The “theatre studies” strand (from the late 1960s and 1970s) concentrates more on the theatre event than on the dramatic text i.e. the moment in live performance when performers and audience come together. Here there is often a close connection with visual arts; the director, performers, and the design team frequently assume a greater importance than the playwright in terms of making work (in some devised performance, for example); and theatre is placed firmly, both critically and practically, within society at both a global and local level (pp. 12-13).

The “performing arts” strand is more concerned with pragmatic issues of making work (e.g. costume design, stage lighting and sound) with less emphasis on history or theory (p. 13).

The “performance studies” strand (from the 1980s) includes many of the above, whilst also broadening ideas of what performance can comprise – both in terms of performance places (often moving outside a designated theatre space) and areas of study. As Schechner writes:

Performances occur in many different instances and kinds. Performance must be constructed as a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human

actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music, and everyday life performances, to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race and class roles and on to healing (from shamanism to surgery), the media and the internet (2006, p. 2).

Mention of these strands is relevant here because many micro-scale theatre companies form during or immediately after higher education, so their areas of study inevitably influence their formative and developing theatre practice. Here, the term “theatre practitioner” denotes someone who creates theatre performances and who uses “written means to attempt to place their practice in a history or tradition of theatre” (Milling & Ley, 2001, p. 173); similarly “theatre practice” refers to the collective work that various theatre practitioners do (Pavis, 1998, p. 392). How and where ‘management’ appears in these strands of discourse is interesting to explore, not least in terms of what managers are *perceived* to be doing, where that doing is seen to ‘fit’ and what value is accorded to it.

## **2.2 Hierarchy and separation**

In the theatre and performance studies literature examined (e.g. Allain & Harvie, 2006; Balme, 2008; Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007; Harvie & Lavender, 2010; Mangan, 2013; Milling & Ley, 2001), arts or cultural management does not feature directly as a separate topic. That said, funding, project and budgeting issues are mentioned within the context of the “everyday practicalities” of theatre work (Mangan, 2013, p. 67) and in the sense that production work requires the effective management of people, time, material resources and money.

Generally speaking the arts/management and culture/commerce ‘divides’ are alive and well, with management being held up as something both necessary for the effective presentation of work *and* likely to encounter resistance. For example,

Time management...has become a favourite topic of a certain kind of self-help literature – often the kind identified with business and management studies. The suspicion might arise, therefore, that it has nothing to do with

Drama, Theatre or Performance – these creative arts which are so far from the time-and-motion world of business studies (Mangan, 2013, p. 24).

Although the writer goes on to refute this, not least because of the unforgiving nature of production schedules, the fact that Mangan feels the need to couch time-management in these terms says a lot about the negative connotations of the 'm' word and the mind-set he expects prospective theatre/performance practitioners to bring with them to an undergraduate course.

The fear of a hierarchical imposition of management on creative work is also discernible.

Hierarchies, indeed, provide the essential structures of management, which can be broken down into several horizontal areas: time management (the schedule), money management (the budget), facility management (the buildings and equipment) and personnel management (human resources). Theatre artists, to be sure, often recoil at such hierarchical terminologies, which are derived from the business world (Cohen, 2011, p. 27).

Even in literature that explores collective or collaborative theatre-making (particularly devising), management issues prove problematic.

Companies established in the late 1960s and early 1970s were often structured in line with the anti-hierarchical and anti-establishment mood of the times. This, Oddey argues, “necessitated organisational structures and working processes that matched certain ideological beliefs” (1994, p. 95) with many companies setting up as collectives and taking on administrative work as part of the general ethos of mucking in and pulling together.

It is suggested that this was not without its difficulties. Heddon & Milling (2006, p. 106) quote John McGrath as follows:

“Everybody was a writer, everybody was a bureaucrat, and everybody could do anything on the show. It was total chaos. The gigs got all fucked up because somebody didn't tell somebody they'd made an arrangement to ring somebody back, because one day they were organising the gigs and the next day they were rushing around finding props”.

In the ensuing decades, there has been a tendency towards increased specialisation, ring fencing of tasks and sharper delineation of roles, together with more formalised company structures. This shift is been attributed to resource constraints, funder requirements and changing artistic priorities (Oddey, 1994; Heddon & Milling, 2006).

In line with this, theatre-making and managerial work, tend to be spoken of as separate areas of practice.

Apart from the making of the artistic product, there are time decisions related to administration of the product, publicity, company business, and evaluating the work (Oddey 1994, p. 14).

... although [contemporary] devising is still regarded as a collaborative creative tool, such creative work is perceived as separate from the pragmatic organisation of the company (Heddon & Milling 2006, p. 158).

Management concerns are often described in terms of limitations: Health & Safety, scarce financial resources, licensing, availability of space.

While rules and constraints are frequently used as triggers for new ideas in theatre-making (Graham & Hoggett, 2009) there is perhaps a difference between restrictions imposed as part of the creative process *within* the rehearsal space and limitations on available funds or logistics being imposed from *outside*. While the former may be integral to the process, in the literature, the latter tends to be considered separately and more sequentially.

For example, in chapter two of her book, Oddey (1994, p. 41) sets out “questions to be asked by any group or company starting to work together...” These concern issues of motivation; group aims and objectives; content or subject matter and artistic form and structure. In chapter six (relating to residency or site-specific work) she adds some key “additional” questions which focus on who the piece is for; where the devising will take place; permissions; licences; funding; planning; allocation of time; administration and coordination (pp. 146-7).

The tension between process and product, between “packaged commodification” and “radicalism and chaos” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 34) seems very familiar, as does Govan et al.’s assertion that:

...two ways of thinking about devising – the radical and the saleable – are not mutually exclusive nor binary opposites, but continually negotiated and re-negotiated by individual artists, performance makers and by theatre companies (Govan et al., 2007, p. 194).

This sense of the boundary-breaking and the commercial as an emulsion that requires continual re-mixing, is not new, embedded as it is in the “historical... separation in Western cultures between the worlds of creativity and commerce” (Bilton 2007, p. 6).

If roles and functions are seen as separate, then it is not surprising that zoning of people occurs too. This can be expressed in terms of an insider-outsider relationship between the creative core (performers, directors, choreographers, writers, musicians, designers, technicians) and those designated as administrators or managers.

*... a group must decide whether to maintain the more traditional responsibilities associated with an administrator's role, such as booking a tour, promoting the product and organising the budget, or to incorporate the administrator into creative decisions made by the company* (Oddey 1994, p. 71, italics added).

By 1999, the [Frantic Assembly] office...included [an Administrator], Production Manager, soon to be joined by a Marketing Administrator and an Education Officer, *bringing the group's full time management and support team* to a total of four people. (Helmer & Malzacher, 2004, pp 58-59, italics added).

The impression here is that not only are roles and functions separate, but that in supporting and working to the decisions of the creative team, the cultural manager and any immediate colleagues occupy a hierarchically inferior position. This begs questions about who is included in or excluded from any given community of practice and what the assumed boundaries are.

### **2.3 Difference**

The literature also reveals some intriguing differences in the ways certain topics are perceived and approached in theatre-making and in cultural management – for example issues around audience and the role of the producer.

One of the concerns of theatre and performance studies is the re-configuration of the relationship between performer and audience. The move away from the idea of the passive spectator to more active and engaged notions of witness, player or co-creator in the process and/or performance, means that the audience has become a much more central concern in performance-making and interpretation.

Third Angel, for example, describes how it always asks the question ‘who are the audience and why are they here?’ In this manner the audience can be seen as another character in the piece (Govan et al., 2007, p. 69).

What is much more difficult to find in the literature, however, is any critical consideration of the means by which that audience is located, attracted to and persuaded to take part in the experience; in other words how the ‘product’ is matched with, and mediated to, the ‘public’ and how new audiences are ‘developed’ – something which is functionally much more the province of the cultural manager. From a cultural management perspective (Hill et al., 1995; Kolb, 2000; Kotler & Scheff, 1997) the relationship between performer and audience begins well before any substantive encounter in a rehearsal room or performance space, and finishes after it, often becoming a longer term connection.

Freshwater (2009, p. 29) picks up on this contrast:

While academic theatre studies continues to engage with hypothetical models of spectatorship, statistical analysis of historical audiences, or the writer’s personal experience, theatre marketing departments are busy surveying the opinions and responses of real audiences through focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

While she does unearth some examples (p. 31) of the “theatre industry attempting to develop a more nuanced understanding of audiences” (Frank and Waugh, 2005), and “some signs that theatre studies is beginning to engage with the industry’s approach”, she observes that this kind of combined investigative approach is unusual.

A second topic is that of the producer – a designation that is establishing itself particularly within *subsidised* theatre and performance, having long been a feature of commercial work. Names that most readily spring to mind are Farooq

Chaudhry, David Jubb, Helen Marriage and Michael Morris. As set out earlier in this review, the creative producer has been the subject of recent empirical research within the cultural management field and the way in which their work is described suggests a robust straddling of the worlds of theatre and management.

The producer sometimes conceives or initiates a project, becoming a lead protagonist in its conception and destiny; equally their commitment is sometimes to realise an artist's vision. .. [S/he] leads in navigating between a bold vision of an idea, and how feasibly – and brilliantly – to deliver it, how to give the idea life and locate it in the world. (Tyndall 2007, p. 1).

This stands in contrast to the way in which the term 'producer' is conceived in the theatre and performance literature surveyed, where the emphasis remains on the *commercial* producer "concerned with ensuring the profitability of [their] investment" (Freshwater, 2009, p. 30), and the focus is primarily on money.

[There is an important level of collaboration at the planning level] between the director and the producer, or perhaps we should say the director and the chief accountant, because these collaborations have to do with reconsiderations of established budgets... (Cohen, 2011, p. 115-116).

The picture is more nuanced in the literature on dramaturgy (Turner & Berndt, 2006; Williams, 2010). In theatre, this is a term used to denote "...an engagement in the process of structuring the work, combined with reflective analysis that accompanies such a process" where the dramaturg, in looking at "the architecture of performance" might define him or herself (in the UK at least) as a curator or creative producer (Turner & Berndt, 2008, pp. 3 & 6). Here, the latter role is seen as "simultaneously administrative and engaged with the development of the artwork, combining a position of fundraiser, organizer, promoter, with a depth of understanding and dialogue with the artists and the artistic process" (p. 112). Moreover, the writers assert that there are facets of the dramaturg's role (within an institutional context) which extend beyond the whole of a specific production "...to encompass the 'whole' that is the theatre organization itself, its context, its repertoire and its artistic policy" (p. 103).

## **Conclusion to Part 2**

From the literature reviewed, the kind of overlap just described, is unusual. The more common impression is that of hierarchical separation between artists and managers, with the 'admin' more commonly depicted in terms of functions which are necessary to support the making and performing of work, though largely from a position outside.

The current paucity of dialogue between the fields of theatre/performance studies and cultural management is also hinted at. This is not an observation levelled solely at the former; it is equally the case that a trawl of cultural management literature would reveal a similar lack of reference to writing and ideas from theatre and performance studies. Such mutual disregard is perhaps worthy of further investigation.

Part 2 of this review, then, has looked for clues to 'what cultural managers do' in theatre and performance literature, and has uncovered little to challenge the prevailing arts/management divide. In Part 3, attention turns to how the arts in general and theatre in particular have been depicted in management literature, to see if further elucidation can be found there.

## **Part 3: The art of... management?**

It is ironic that while cultural managers (particularly in the subsidised arts) have been consistently encouraged to follow rationalistic models and principles, a growing number of management theorists are focusing their attention on the value of arts metaphors, theories of art and arts practices to an understanding of what managers (or leaders) do, or rather should do, in non-arts organisations – most notably with reference to the corporate sector as it attempts to navigate times of significant change.

The question is no longer whether artistic ways should be part of management and organization... but when and how do they best fit in (Barry 2008, p. 36).

The drive to liken leadership, strategy, management or work to 'art' is in large part a reaction to a positivist view of the world as stable and rational and the desire to find novel and more appropriate ways of understanding, living and organising in an increasingly complex and unpredictable environment. If science



and logic cannot make things more 'knowable' then perhaps the arts and art-based practices can provide a better metaphorical – even epistemological – way forward?

...the 'art of' seems particularly appropriate when the status quo won't do anymore (Barry, 2008, p. 36).

Whichever view is taken, the 'art of' in organisation and management studies is an eclectic area of scholarship. Approaches have ranged from "dramatism" (Burke, 1969a, 1969b) and "dramaturgy" (Goffman, 1959; Mangham & Overington, 1983, 1987) as frameworks for analysing organisational life, to the employment of artists and deployment of arts/theatre techniques or performances to enliven business training programmes and stimulate tangential ways of seeing (Clark, 2008, p. 402). Approaches shift from the superficial and rhetorical ("a lure, something to give the work a bit of panache" Barry, 2008, p. 31) to a focus on the skilful (competent, elegant, even aesthetically sophisticated) mastery of certain practices and traditions (Mintzberg, 1987, with a genesis as far back as Barnard, 1938), even extending to the field of organisational aesthetics. Indeed, Guillet de Monthoux and Stather (2008) assert that "aesthetics and art provide the *only possible way* of ever engaging with, or having any experience of, the organizational principle" (p. 424, italics added).

The following sections identify three of the ways in which the arts and management are seen to intersect.

### 3.1 **Using the arts**

Some of the emerging literature explores ways in which (mainly) corporate managers can *use* the arts in their organisations e.g. Austin & Devin, 2003 and Seifter, 2001. As an example, Darsø (2004) talks of four options:

- arts for *decoration*;
- arts for *entertainment*;
- applying the arts as *instruments* for team-building, communication training, leadership development, problem solving and innovation processes...[see, for example, Taylor & Ladkin, 2009, 2014; Sutherland, 2013];

- integrating the arts in a *strategic process of transformation*, involving personal development and leadership, culture and identity, creativity and innovation, as well as customer relations and marketing (italics added)...[through, for example, an artist-in -residence scheme].

### 3.2 ‘Management is like the arts’

Other studies seek to illuminate management issues through arts-based similes and metaphors, so management is *like* the arts, and managers are (or should be) *like* artists e.g. Barrett, 2000; Grint, 2000; Handy, 1996; Kao, 1997; Leigh & Maynard, 1994; Mintzberg, 1998; and Vaill, 1989.

The symphony orchestra is like many other professional organisations in that it is structured around the work of highly trained individuals who know what they have to do and just do it. Such professionals hardly need in-house procedures or time-study analysts to tell them how to do their jobs. Indeed in such environments, covert leadership may matter more than overt leadership. There needs to be a greater appreciation in all managerial work of this kind of covert leadership: not leadership actions in and of themselves – motivating, coaching... – but rather unobtrusive actions that infuse all the other things a manager does (Mintzberg, 1998).

One of the best known areas of investigation is “dramaturgy” which – in contrast to the term’s usage in theatre and performance studies – is “the [ontological] position that social and organisational life can be seen *as if it were theatre*” (Pye, 2008, p. 82, italics added). As a key inspiration, Goffman (1959, 1974):

...elaborated at length how human action is dependent of time, place and audience in the drama of life, which takes place on a stage, in settings, as individuals play roles assigned to them in part, through the socialization of norms and values (Pye, 2008, p. 83).

Key here are notions of “frontstage” and “backstage” with the former denoting selective presentations of ourselves for public consumption, using roles, scripts, action and language which are designed to show us in the best possible light and through which we seek to influence others in those social or organisational settings. Backstage, on the other hand, is where we are more likely to be our “authentic” selves and where we prepare for those public performances.

“Impression management” and the intricacies and hidden dynamics of face-to-face encounters are thus central to Goffman’s thesis.

From a dramaturgical perspective, then, organisations are like theatres and managers not only manage their own performances but also play a significant part in delineating the scripts, roles and performances of others.

Some have taken this thinking further. Mangham and Overington – who (significantly?) observe that there is “little evidence that [Goffman] ever went near a theatre” (1987, p. 201) – advance his work by examining everyday action in organisational life through an interpretive framework of props, costumes, characters, plots, scripts, rehearsals and performances. In the cultural management field (in a rare instance of cross-over), Taalas (1999a, 1999b) adapted this to an analysis of organisation and repertoire management in a large-scale Finnish theatre.

Others have compared and contrasted the dramaturgical metaphor with that of improvisation, either in jazz (Bastien & Hostager 1988; Kao, 1997; Kamoche et al. 2003; Weick, 1998; Barrett, 2000) or in theatre:

Goffman’s dramaturgical metaphor for everyday life emphasized the parallels between life and scripted conventional theatre ... a better metaphor for life is improvisational theatre (Sawyer, 2001b, p. 149).

The argument runs that – in times of discontinuous change – the first and second rules of improvisation (“Yes, and...” and “Don’t write the script in your head”) encourage democratic creative collaboration, in the moment, without thinking ahead.

In fact, Crossan (1998, p. 593) concludes from her work with the Second City Improvisation Company, that aspects of improvised performance (i.e. impro) could be directly applied in a management context “through exercises originally designed to develop the improvisational capability of actors” (pp. 594-595). These she characterises as: interpreting the environment; crafting strategy; cultivating leadership; fostering teamwork; developing individual skills; and assessing organisational culture. In a further paper (Vera & Crossan, 2004) there is an analysis of how training in improvisational theatre skills can have a beneficial effect on (team) innovation in organisational settings.

Kamoche et al (2002, p. 1) extend the relevance and reach of improvisation still further with the assertion that “improvisation is a central feature of organizational reality and indeed a definitive feature of the way we go about our daily lives”.

This shift from *as* to *is* explored in the next section.

### 3.3 ‘Management is an art’

A third category of work asserts that management *is* ‘performance’ or *is* ‘an art’ (e.g. De Pree, 1989, 1992; Finn & Jedlicka, 1998; and Richards 1997).

Thus, just as a play comes alive only if the script is regarded as good, the actors as persuasive, and the sets appropriate for the context, and the audience engaged to *believe* the production, so leaders can be successful only if their followers come to believe in the collective identity, the strategic vision, and the organisational tactics of the leader. For that to happen the skills of the performing arts are crucial. Leadership, therefore, is more a performance than a routine; it is the world of the theatre and it has to be continuously ‘brought off’ rather than occasionally acted out (Grint, 2000, pp. 22-23, italics in original).

In contrast to the metaphorical view of organisational life being *like* theatre, Burke (1968, 1969a, 1969b) subscribed to the view that life *is* theatre, or more specifically ‘drama’.

Here, drama is seen as

...a method of analysis which asserts the reality of symbolic action as the defining feature of the human, and uses drama, not analogically, but as a formal model with which to explore both action and explanations of action (Mangham & Overington 1987, p. 71, as cited in Prasad, 2005, p. 52).

Burke believed that there were five dramatic elements in any social situation or personal narrative: act (or incident); scene (context); agents (the ‘actors’ involved); agency (the actions of the agents), and purpose (the agents’ desires and intentions), all of which constituted the beginnings of “dramatistic” analysis.

Put another way, Burke is suggesting that “in order to understand our own and others’ lives, we cast them into a *dramatic form* (with a plot, script and principal characters)” in the context of both individual action and the playing out of those

actions “within the wider drama of social and cultural history” (Prasad 2005, p. 52, italics in original). In this way, we come up with stories and explanations about our own motives, actions and identity, whilst doing the same with regard to other people.

Taylor and Carboni (2008) assert that if there are lessons to be learned for organisations from the arts, and if those lessons are to be helpful in enacting organisational phenomena rather than simply appreciating those phenomena, then those lessons should come from arts *practices and techniques* rather than from art metaphors or criticism, thereby changing the focus from ‘knowing that’ to ‘knowing how’ (Brady 1986). Their attempt to move beyond metaphor takes the form of an adaptation of Stanislavski’s method, “to analyze organisational actions in which we use expressive verbs” (Taylor & Carboni, 2008, p. 220).

Others focus more on the value of play in corporate life. Guillet de Monthoux and Stather express a particular interest in arts organisations as a domain for management research, because they are “deliberately open for playful experiences” (2008, p. 428) despite the fact that they must also operate as businesses. They see the sustenance of play as a major challenge for all organisations, positing the view that “aesthetic play is not just a discursive metaphor that portrays organizations as orchestras, it’s *performed* as a kind of organizing” (p. 435, italics added).

And in a wonderfully rhetorical flourish, it would appear that the (business) manager might even transform into an “organisational artist” (Barry, 2008, pp. 39-40), someone who enables the work to get “done in delightful, imaginative ways”.

### **Conclusion to Part 3**

In and across these three ways in which arts and management are seen to intersect, theatre – as a metaphor or a way of life – appears to offer a particularly powerful means of analysing behaviour in a range of *organisational* settings (Pye, 2008, p. 83). And yet, when it comes to thinking about what such perspectives or analyses might add to an understanding of organisational behaviour in *theatre* settings, there is a strange sense of disconnect.

First, It is interesting that many of the writers who draw on theatre seem to base much of their thinking about ‘performance’, ‘role’, ‘theatricality in everyday life’

and 'theatre as reflective of life' on the history and traditions of the director-led, naturalistic performance of script-based, well-made plays i.e. what Mangan (2013, p. 12) refers to as the 'drama' strand. Equally, improvisation is taken to mean impro (or TheatreSports, Johnstone, 2007), which is a very particular practice and use of the term. Thus, a part is taken to represent a whole in ways that are unacknowledged and uncritical.

Second, there are political issues around appropriation. There are those (e.g. Beirne, 2012) who feel just as uncomfortable about (business) management theorists *using* the arts, as they do about incursions of business management *into* the arts – particularly in light of the self-serving business interests which are deemed to have caused the current global economic downturn.

Third, and correspondingly, the focus of much of this literature is *corporate* life (one specific context), *not* the "often complex sites in which culture gets done" or "the social worlds in which cultural artefacts are enacted and produced" (Atkinson, 2004, pp. 94 & 97).

Sociological thought...finds itself entangled in the web of theatrical imagery, but rarely frees itself to treat theatre and performance as topics of scrutiny in their own right (p. 94).

In this sense, then, cultural managers may simply not be the intended readership. Indeed, in one telling instance where cultural managers *are* mentioned, they are depicted more as beneficiaries of rationalist management ideas going in the opposite direction.

...management practices have made inroads into artistic practices; art [sic] management has been a course of study since the 1960s and now art managers the world over have become familiar with concepts of human resource management, competitive strategy, operations management and organizational structure' (Barry, 2008, p. 32).

Otherwise the literature tends to ignore them (in contrast to the director, actor, jazz musician or orchestral conductor), with 'artistic ways' seen as the exclusive preserve of artists.

Such disconnect with this literature could be dismissed as rather precious exceptionalism. After all the organisation as theatre metaphor (for example) is a constructed and creative blend that is more than the simple sum of its inputs

'organisation' and 'theatre' (Cornelissen, 2004). That said, the aptness and heuristic value of a metaphor are also determined by "the *conceived* similarity and dissimilarity between concepts and their respective domains" (p. 718, italics in original), which brings into play the conceiver and her background, beliefs, values, areas of knowledge and community. Thus, perhaps, a greater bias towards the "vehicle" (theatre) than the "tenor" (organisation) on the part of the conceiver might militate significantly against metaphorical effectiveness.

All of which raises some further questions about ways of understanding what cultural managers do. Might a close-up study of what they do be revelatory precisely *because* they inhabit, navigate and mediate the space between arts, management and organisation on a daily basis? How might theatre as a metaphor for behaviour in organisational settings be challenged, extended and (perhaps) reconfigured through an observation of theatre managers? In other words, if the existing allusions to theatre and improvisation in 'the art of...' literature do not work in respect of the research questions here, then what *would* work?

Clark (2008), in an article on "organization theatre", provides a reminder that one of the defining features of the organisations in which my subjects work, is their dedication to the creation of "intendedly aesthetic experiences".

Furthermore, he suggests that:

...future studies [might] benefit from using a frame that is as far as possible derived from studies of theatre which offer researchers the possibility to organise their description and analysis in a manner that is *isomorphic* with the activities to which they will be witness (p. 407, italics added).

Barry (2008) also suggests that:

More close-up studies... will be needed. Studies of managers working with artists may provide an important complement... [and] we will also require new forms of scholarly inquiry...and framing, ones that respect the underlying assumptions of contemporary art ... (pp. 39-40).

This research is an attempt to do just that.

## **Part 4: Organisation and management studies**

Part 4 moves on from an appraisal of 'the art of...' to review and critique other relevant/useful theoretical perspectives drawn from organisation and management studies. Here the review explores some of the literature which has posed similar questions; contrasts realist and positivist perspectives with those that take a more interpretive and process-orientated approach; and sets out why this study is a multi-faceted sensemaking exercise, both ontologically and epistemologically.

### **4.1 Posing a similar question**

The principal research question in this thesis is consciously resonant of the question "What do managers do?" which formed the basis of Henry Mintzberg's 1968 PhD thesis, published in 1973 as *The Nature of Managerial Work*. The origin of his enquiry was dissatisfaction with existing depictions of managers' work: he found most of what had been written comprised "abstract generalities devoid of the hard data of empirical study"(1973, p. 7), and observed that managers themselves had difficulty in explaining how their daily activities added up to something called 'management'. His work was ground-breaking in that it was "based exclusively on the evidence from empirical studies of managerial work" (p. 4), combining "structured observation" and "flexibility to develop content categories inductively" (p. 25). He followed each of five male corporate executives through their working week, keeping a minute by minute record of their work, discerning patterns of activity which – far from being programmed and static - were fast moving, vivid, discontinuous and dynamic.

There are some significant points of contact between Mintzberg's work and my focus of interest. I feel dissatisfied with existing depictions of cultural managers' work: there is no shortage of abstract generalities in the literature on cultural management. As noted earlier, there is a paucity of empirical work exploring the day to day 'doings' of those who are classified and who classify themselves as cultural managers (Bilton, 2007). Moreover, "managing and leading arts and cultural activity is often practised unconsciously" alongside an enduring tendency "to set the pace of things too fast to have time for the thinking as well as the doing" (Summerton et al., 2006, p. 6). Finally, Mintzberg's research also keeps one important elephantine question in the room: is what cultural managers do any different from what other kinds of managers do?



Mintzberg's study has a prominent position in a range of empirical studies of managerial work, roles and functions, ranging from Carlson (1951) in Sweden, to Stewart (1967, 1976, and 1982) in the UK, to Kotter (1982) and Boyatzis (1982) in the US.

Taken together, what these writers seemed to suggest is that

...managerial work is ill-defined and subject to uncertainty, and that management activities are fragmented, involve making choices within constraints, communicating, building networks, and require specific competences (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 23).

This picture was significant in that it called into question the 'classical' view of management (Taylor, 1911), which favoured (and in some quarters still favours) 'scientific' and 'systematic' ways of managing organisations and led to a concomitant view of managers as skilled appliers of particular functions e.g. planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling (Fayol, 1949 [1916]), or planning, organising, staffing, direction, coordination, reporting and budgeting (Gulick & Urwick, 1937), which would have the effect of turning inputs into intended outputs, thus maximising profit and productivity. While some writers took an arguably more critical and 'humane' view (Follett 1918; Barnard, 1938), stressing the need for democratic and cooperative forms of organisation and decision-making as ways of motivating and involving employees, the underlying purpose remained the same: the enhancement of efficiency through "intervention techniques to control people, direct their activities and make changes" (Cunliffe, 2009, pp. 16-17).

Watson (2002) terms this a "systems-control" view of organisations and management, tracing its emergence to:

...modernist ways of thinking about human beings and the possibilities of their controlling their social, political and economic worlds...associated with the growth of industrialised economies, bureaucratic organisations and a highly rationalised or scientific way of thinking about the world ...' (p. 54).

What Mintzberg et al. demonstrated was that – empirically – things tend to be far more ambiguous and uncertain than that (Kotter, 1982).

It is tempting to think, then, that the answer to the sense of mismatch between what cultural managers are supposed to do and what they actually do; between “abstract generalities” and the more pragmatic specifics of their everyday working lives; between something tidy and something more messy, can be found through a detailed examination of the work of Mintzberg et al. and an application of their findings to those managing in the cultural sector. While their research offers a valuable foundation for thinking about ‘what cultural managers do’ (explored further in the Analysis chapter below), there are issues to address and critiques of an ontological and epistemological kind to be explored as well.

First, Mintzberg’s 1973 work (and that of others who examined ‘what managers do’) assumes the existence of an external reality; that organisations have an identity that is independent from the people who act within them; that human behaviour is controlled by norms and principles; and that it is possible to identify a set of managerial roles and characteristics that can be applied universally across different countries, contexts, sectors and types of work. There is then the risk that, having become familiar with the (apolitically presented) characteristics and roles identified above, both scholars and practitioners might be tempted to focus on acquiring or delivering them (as prescriptive rules or guidelines), to the exclusion of alternative configurations, or indeed, a critical approach to the whole notion of management ‘characteristics’ or ‘roles’ (Cunliffe, 2009).

Second, having dismissed ‘classical’ or ‘scientific’ notions of management as a ‘myth’,

[i]t is easy to allow this evidence of seemingly reactive, fragmentary, speculative and chaotic wheeling and dealing to blind us to what it ‘all adds up to’, in organisational or corporately strategic terms (Watson, 2002, p. 85).

In other words, the link with any sense of planning or coordinating is broken and all that is left is free-wheeling activity and the nagging feeling that any kind of purposive achievement is really only a fluke, with no “organisational logic” (p. 86) behind it at all. There is, then, the danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Watson advocates a “process-relational” way of looking at organising and managing as an alternative to the “systems-control” orthodoxy (to which the

work of Mintzberg and others offered an important challenge) whilst *at the same time* recognising that “for an organization to survive and flourish in its environment, there has to be steering, coordinating, shaping and directing” (2001, p. 37) *of some kind*, whether undertaken by those with the title ‘manager’ or as a shared endeavour. He distinguishes between management as a *function* (with sub-functions like coordinating, shaping and directing) and managing as an *activity* which somehow (though not necessarily directly or visibly) brings these functions about “through the continual and continuous exchanging of information, favours, material and symbolic resources” (p. 37), in order “to complete [work] tasks undertaken in the organisation’s name” (2002, p. 59). Management is thus seen as “pulling things together and along in a general direction to bring about long-term organisational survival” (2001, p. 38) in circumstances of ambiguity, uncertainty and multiple human priorities and aspirations.

These twin concerns with the early work of Mintzberg et al. (above) are symptomatic of a more questioning approach to management and organisation, with the nature of social reality and our experiences of and relationships with it being brought more to the fore. So, rather than the key questions being ‘what *is* management?’ or even ‘what do managers *do*?’ both are rolled into a third question, ‘what is going on here?’ which reframes the ontology as something much less realist (positivist), and much more interpretive: “a scholarly position that takes human *interpretation* as the starting point for developing knowledge about the social world” (Prasad, 2005, p. 3, italics added).

#### **4.2 Interpretive, process-orientated and organising perspectives**

Alongside cultural anthropologists and sociologists – Clifford (1983), Garfinkel (1967) and Geertz (1983) – Berger and Luckman’s (1967) ground-breaking work argued that, rather than being enshrined in structures and causal relations, social realities are “constructed” in social interaction – hence the term social constructionism.

Thus, organisations and identities (e.g. as a manager) are constructed and maintained in conversations between people as they make sense of what is happening to and around them. Furthermore, these “realities” can become “objective facticities” (p. 30) through “reification”.

Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things... [it] implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship in the human world (p. 89).

Through such a social constructionist lens:

...the organization and its structure, systems and processes don't exist as objects separate from people – they are created as organizational members talk about what they think is happening and what needs to be done (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 14).

And underlying all this is the assumption that thinking, talking and doing are intimately intertwined:

The way we talk and think about the world is closely implicated in how we act in the world...the language and concepts we apply to the world around us can be seen as a framing of reality that, to a certain extent, brings about that reality (Watson, 2002, p. 4).

In this sense, organisations cannot be reduced to structures and systems which are 'out there' and separate from human beings. Organisations do not have a life of their own; which amongst other things makes it impossible for them to have their *own* concerns and purposes. Management – far from being a fixed body of knowledge or set of tools, techniques, roles and characteristics most often associated with the running of organisations – is a *discursive* and *contestable* construction. Not only that, both 'organisation' and 'management' – in the *doing* – cannot be fixed, complete, and done-and-dusted; they are *ongoing* and continually *emerging* in conversation and other forms of communication. As such, they are perhaps more plausibly depicted as gerundive *processes of organising and managing*.

To talk of *organising* instead of 'organisation' helps remind us that, when making complex work arrangements, we never actually 'arrive'. We are always on the move. Organisation and management are never fully accomplished. Organising and re-organising goes on and on (Watson, 2002, p. 59).

And here there is a further important distinction to make. Whereas mainstream management (and cultural management) writing uses the term 'process' with reference to "flows occurring within the confines of organizational goals and

structures” (marketing or strategic planning, for example), here “organization [is] seen as *constituted* by process” (Hernes, 2008, p. 19, italics in original).

The word ‘organization’ is a noun and is also a myth. If one looks for an organization one will not find it. What will be found is that there are events, linked together, that transpire within concrete walls and these sequences, their pathways, their timing, are the forms we erroneously make into substances when we talk about an organization (Weick, 1974, p. 358, cited in Hernes, 2008, p. 115).

According to Hernes, Weick was radical in recognising that “...researchers spend a lot of time describing and comparing entities that fall into the category of ‘organizations’, thus imposing limitations on how far we can go in actually understanding what goes on when people organize” (Hernes, 2008, p. 114).

What, then, if ‘what cultural managers do’ were to be thought of in terms of ‘what goes on when they *organise*?’

First, there would need to be clarity about the connection between ‘managing’ and ‘organising’.

Watson maintains that the two terms are synonymous: “managing is organizing”, with the primary role of managers as “contributing towards the overall performance of the organisation as a whole” (Watson, 2001, p. 39).

Weick (2009, pp. 39-40) similarly suggests that:

...organizing is the act of trying to hold things together... [and that] our job as researchers is to develop theories about what ‘holding it together’ means, what it depends on, and when what it depends on happens.

Second, if managing is organising and organising is about pulling or holding things together with some future action in mind, how is that accomplished and how might it be understood?

Weick asserts that sensemaking is central to organising because it is “the primary site where meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action...” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005, p. 410). Hernes and Maitlis (2010, p. 29) see sensemaking as an “ongoing activity underlying the process of organizing”. Pye goes further, framing organising as “sensemaking in action”

(2005, p. 44), such that sensemaking and organising effectively constitute each other.

So if managing is organising and organising is sensemaking, what, then, is sensemaking?

### **4.3 A multi-faceted sensemaking exercise...**

At one level, sensemaking can be described very simply as “making something sensible” (Weick, 1995a, p. 16), with making sense an ongoing process of organising.

According to Weick, organising is “the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, ‘what’s the story?’” (Weick, 2009, p. 129).

Sensemaking is the process by which we construct that story, or rather stories. We do this by attending to “cues” (or stimuli) from that ongoing streaming of experience, which we (individually or with others) match with “frames” (frameworks or mental models – existing beliefs, habits, ways of seeing) to make meaning.

Weick maintains that sensemaking differs from interpreting or understanding (which the above description could also denote) by virtue of *seven characteristics*.

Sensemaking is:

- ***Grounded in identity construction***

Sensemaking begins with a sensemaker. “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” has four pronouns, all four of which point to the person doing the sensemaking (Weick, 1995a, p. 18).

Sensemaking as a process is dependent on and activated by a sensemaker. How she thinks of herself both determines the cues to which she attends and the frames to which she matches them. And yet the sensemaker’s notion of herself is also indicated through her discovery of how and what she thinks (p. 62).

Once I know who I am then I know what is out there. But the direction of causality flows just as often from the situation to a definition of self as it does the other way (p. 20).

What makes this even more complicated is that the notion of a single identity is itself a wobbly construction, “an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate” (p. 21), not least because other sensemakers are invariably involved.

And yet despite the complication Weick suggests that establishing and maintaining a *positive* sense of self – albeit through “continual redefinition” and processes of interaction – is a central concern of sensemaking, which is why he places it at the top of his list of characteristics.

- ***Retrospective***

Time is crucial to Weick’s notion of sensemaking, and he depicts it as two forms: pure duration *and* discrete segments.

...experience as we know it exists in the form of distinct events. But the only way we get this impression is by stepping outside the stream of experience and directing attention to it. And it is only possible to direct attention to what exists, that is, *what has already passed* (Weick, 2005a, p. 25, italics added).

So, by the time we pay attention to (or “bracket”) a cue or discrete segment, it is already in the past. Furthermore, we often rely on past experiences to help us determine what we should be paying attention to in the present. In addition, whatever is happening now, “in the moment of reflection, will impact on the sense made of the thing being reflected upon” (p. 26). Similarly “[a]ctions are known only when they have been completed, which means they are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us” (p. 26).

In this way, meanings are always made retrospectively *and* they are modified in the making by what is underway now, by who we are, what our past experiences have been, and what our contingent self chooses or is required to pay attention to.

And the whole process can get stymied by the multiplicity of possible meanings that may arise and need to be synthesised. This, Weick calls “equivocality”, which he differentiates from ignorance or uncertainty, because the problem is not one of too few choices or ‘not knowing’; it is one of *too many* possibilities and the risk, thereby, of confusion. The way through this maze, however, is

guided by clarity on (and filtering through) values (the province of 'frames') which the sensemaker uses to make sense of the cues picked up.

- ***Enactive of sensible environments***

This category addresses the 'making' part of sensemaking and further pinpoints its distinction from 'interpreting'. The latter, according to Weick (1995a, p. 30) "explains how people cope with entities that already exist", which belongs more properly within a realist paradigm, whereas the former "...explains how entities get there in the first place", which is much more the domain of constitutive *action*, which is intimately intertwined with cognition. Thus sensemaking is not thinking followed by action, or action followed by thinking: it is perhaps more a case of "acting thoughtfully" (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007) or "thinking actingly" (Mangham and Pye, 1991).

Through action, then, (which includes speech), people "*create* the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face" (Weick, 1995a, p. 31, italics added). We actively *construct* that which we encounter; it is not simply passively noticed 'out there'.

- ***Social***

Here Weick emphasises that sensemaking – far from being an individual or solitary activity – is a social process such that "human thinking and social functioning... [are] essential aspects of each other (Weick, 1995a, p. 39).

We do not engage in sensemaking as hermetically sealed units or blank slates; we bring a range of beliefs, hopes, fears and expectations to our ongoing interactions with others; these in turn feed back into, and influence, our mental frames and sense of identity. Sensemaking is a process that is socially *conditioned*. Whatever we do is contingent on others, particularly if we are to engage in shared action.

Thus, for Weick, an organisation is:

...a network of intersubjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday social interaction (Weick, 1995a, pp. 38-39).



The mention of a common language reinforces the importance of 'talk' as a crucial means by which social contact and conduct is mediated, negotiated and maintained.

People have the capacity to shape or reinforce meanings for others through talk, conversation, instructions and stories, which can be exercises in power over others' meaning making. People can also agree to differ for all sorts of reasons and still engage in concerted action, so shared sensemaking does not necessarily equate with shared meaning (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992, as cited in Weick, 1995a, p. 42): what is required is a *sufficiency* of sharedness to act in a concerted fashion.

- **Ongoing**

Weick maintains that sensemaking never starts, because time, as pure duration, never stops. Besides, there is no external reality which can be used as a starting point. We are always

...in the middle of things which become things, only when [we] focus on the past from some point beyond it...to understand sensemaking is to be sensitive to the ways in which people chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments (Weick, 1995a, p. 43).

And the things we are in the middle of, are what Weick calls "projects" or "organized sequences" which, if interrupted, constitute *sensebreaking*, which tends to bring shock and negative emotion in its wake (unless the interruption is swiftly removed, or results in accelerated completion of the task). Weick also argues that when something unexpected happens within an organised sequence ("regulations, deaths, competitors, takeovers, reorganization..." p. 48), this triggers a very obvious occasion of *sensemaking* ('what is going on here?') because the identified cues no longer fit the frame; the existing story "is no longer plausible", and "autonomic arousal increases" (p. 46), which warns us that there is something to which we need to pay attention, in order to take appropriate action.

This is a situation where the response to the question 'same or different?' is emphatically 'different', which breaches continuity and disrupts ongoing collective action. This activates efforts to make plausible sense of what is

happening in order to “normalize... the breach, restore...expectation, and enable... projects to continue” (Weick, 2009, p. 140).

Such circumstances differ, therefore, from everyday swift, effortless and largely invisible organising, when things might be ticking along nicely, with relatively short time-gaps between acting and reflecting, no serious discrepancy between cues and frames, and feelings of order, clarity and rationality sustained, at least for the time being.

- ***Focused on and extracted by cues***

Cues are vital to an understanding of sensemaking.

Central to the development of plausible meanings is the bracketing of cues from the environment, and the interpretations of those cues based on salient frames. Sensemaking is thus about connecting cues and frames to create an account of what is going on (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 552).

We create meaning in the space between cues and frames, with each being influenced or changed in the process.

Cues, however, are not simply ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered. In noticing or bracketing them and thereby extracting them, we are in effect *enacting* them for further use as triggers for action and points of reference, “against which a feeling of organization and direction can emerge” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 258).

Weick maintains that social context (by which he means something more like the immediate social situation) affects the extraction of cues, and that without a context, equivocality (too many possible meanings) can result, impeding effective sensemaking.

Finally, cues are bound up with actions: they can be the product of them and they can evoke them; they can provide justification for and post-hoc rationalisation of them. We connect them with frames to create a plausible account of what is going on.

- ***Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy***

Sensemaking is not about ‘truth’ or getting something ‘right’: it is more about getting better (i.e. more plausible) stories about what is going on.

People do not need to perceive the current situation or problems accurately to solve them; they can act effectively simply by making sense of circumstances in ways that appear to move toward general long-term goals (Weick, 2009, p. 142).

The important thing is that “plausible stories keep things moving” and are thus “salutary” (p. 142). This means they have to be good enough (i.e. provide enough resonance, coherence and certainty) to trigger (collective) action and generate new inputs, which can subsequently modify the story and trigger more action, thus keeping things moving again. Plausible stories both explain (they are products of previous efforts at sensemaking) and energize (they can also be used prospectively) in an iterative and ongoing fashion.

In summary, then, if Weick’s seven characteristics are brought together, the following description of sensemaking emerges:

Sensemaking involves the *ongoing* retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with *identity* in the *social* context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract *cues* and make *plausible* sense *retrospectively*, while *enacting* more or less order into those ongoing circumstances (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005, p. 409, italics added).

Much of Weick’s work has focused on how people in work settings make sense of unexpected, disturbing or confusing events such as emergencies, crises and instances of serious error or major unpredictability, all of which mobilise these seven characteristics and bring sensemaking into sharp relief, stressing the need for “high reliability organizing”, “improvising”, “resilient performance” and “mindfulness” (Weick, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Accordingly, *organisational* sensemaking (‘how can we know what we think until we see what we say?’) is both similar to the sensemaking we might do in other areas of our lives *and* different in that it is much less taken-for-granted (Czarnaiwska-Joerges, 1992, p. 120) “because organizations challenge everything and ask for explanations of everything...” (p. 121).

While Weick is clear that organisations structure and are structured by sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995a, p. 64), he denies that this constitutes in any way a sensemaking *theory* of organisations. Instead, he maintains that certain ways of talking about organisations “allow for sensemaking to be a central activity in the construction of both the organization and the environments it confronts” (p. 69).

To organize is to impose order, counteract deviations, simplify, and connect, and the same holds true when people try to make sense.

Organizing and sensemaking have much in common (p. 82).

It is within this context that Weick distinguishes between “verbs” and “nouns” and between “intersubjectivity” and “generic subjectivity” which reinforces organisational sensemaking as “an issue of talk, language and communication, whereby situations, organizations and environments are *talked* into existence” (Hernes, 2008, p. 116).

Sensemaking ‘in motion’ is what takes place in groups acting in relatively tight timespaces, which may be characterized by...*intersubjectivity*, which is sensemaking that consists of *verbs* rather than nouns.

However ...[m]uch as sensemaking is conceptualized as taking place in the midst of streams ... there are inevitably more stable constellations for factors around which people organize. This is the world of *nouns*; the enacted world of tangible entities, technical artefacts [rules, habits, routines], around which stability of meaning revolves in relative stability [*generic subjectivity*] (Hernes, 2008, pp. 117-118, italics added).

Organising as sensemaking is therefore what happens between verbs and nouns (or in Watson’s terms, between activities and functions) and between the intersubjective and the generically subjective.

It is important to note at this juncture, however, that Weick’s writing has not been without its critics.

Hernes (2008) observes that much of Weick’s work has concentrated overly on crisis situations involving “tightly coupled” small groups (e.g. fire crews) under intense pressure, where verbs and intersubjectivity have inevitably been more to the fore, and so organisational ‘unfolding’ over longer timescales has received less attention.

Others (e.g. Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2012) consider Weick's sensemaking perspective as overly cognitive; or as diminishing or discounting issues of power and the broader social, political and economic factors outside the sensemaking group (Helms Mills, 2003).

These and other investigative areas have been examined, both by Weick himself and by others, thereby extending and expanding notions of organisational sensemaking. Some of the topics explored include sensemaking and... organisational change (Luscher & Lewis, 2008); sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991); leadership and meaning-making (Conger, 1991; Pondy, 1978; Pye, 2005; Smircich & Morgan, 1982; Thayer, 1988); learning (Schwandt, 2005); intuition (Sonenshein, 2007); stories and storytelling (Boje, 1991; Boyce, 1995); reflective practice (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009); entrepreneurship (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010); disruption, mood and openness (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013), and embodiment (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

Research has also focused on different sites of sensemaking: universities (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Milliken, 1990), medical care and hospitals (Heimer, 1992; Westley, 1992) and the arts.

In this last category, the literature tends to fall into two camps.

The first focuses on the arts as a means of unpacking and understanding more about sensemaking in other kinds of setting or enterprise (and thus connects with 'the art of...' strand of organisation, management and leadership studies referred to earlier).

Barry and Meisiek (2010), for instance, examined sensemaking in arts-based initiatives as good for mindfulness and richer sensemaking in business organisations. Weick, Gilfillan and Keith (1973) explored the effect of composer credibility on orchestral performance to assess whether or not "communicator credibility affects attention to and comprehension of a stimulus object under conditions of direct exposure in a quasi-field experiment".

Maitlis (2005) and Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) looked at the social processes of sensemaking and the triggers and enablers of sensegiving in three British orchestras. Maitlis (2005) identified four forms of organisational sensemaking based on two intersecting criteria: "animation" (the extent to which stakeholders are involved in sensemaking) and "control" (the extent to which organisational

leaders are involved in sensemaking). The four forms – which comprise different proportions of leader and stakeholder *sensegiving* – were “guided” (high animation and high control); “restricted” (low animation and high control); “fragmented” (high animation and low control); and “minimal” (low animation and low control), with each producing different sets of outcomes.

Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) ascertained that the perception or anticipation of gaps in sensemaking processes was a significant “trigger” and that discursive ability (on the part of leaders or stakeholders) and “process facilitators” (routines and practices that allow organizational actors to engage) were important sensegiving enablers. While they concluded that the generalisability of their findings needed further testing, they felt it was “unlikely that sensemaking processes in orchestras differ fundamentally from those in other kinds of [medium-sized] organizations” (Maitlis, 2005, p. 44) and that despite the particularity of orchestral “products and services... and their specific dynamics and distinctive history...[w]e do not believe that these differences are likely to affect the conditions of sensegiving in ways that diminish the...findings...” (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p. 81).

In a second category of literature the focus is on sensemaking as a way of thinking about what is going on in particular areas of the arts.

For example, Humphreys, Ucbasaran and Lockett (2012) looked at stories and storytelling as templates to guide jazz musicians’ sensemaking. Murnighan and Conlon (1991) considered sensemaking practices in a string quartet, concluding that successful music ensembles manage daily paradoxes (leadership vs. democracy, the ambiguous position of the second violinist, and confrontation vs. compromise) implicitly through their practice, rather than by explicitly discussing or attempting to resolve them. Foreman-Wernet and Dervin (2011) used a sensemaking approach to gain a better understanding of how audiences experience the arts rather than through “traditional social science surveys”.

There is no value judgement or hierarchy attached to the distinction between the two categories of study delineated above, nor is it suggested that sensemaking research in any particular class of site should or should not have wider relevance. There is nevertheless the basis here for a critique, and what the distinction does do is prompt a consideration of how a sensemaking perspective might inform and help this research. In what ways might it be used

as a means and a perspective to look, listen and think with, in addressing the question 'what do cultural managers do?'

This study is a sensemaking enquiry in the following ways.

First, interpretive or social constructionist notions in general are not common in cultural management research, where a realist paradigm still holds sway; instrumental ('how to...') concerns continue to dominate, and critical perspectives are largely confined to cultural policy debates and the abstractions of cultural studies. So a sensemaking perspective (managing = organising = sensemaking in action) offers a substantially different epistemological 'take' on the research questions. In addition, micro-scale theatre companies (like other arts organisations) are themselves directly and explicitly engaged in 'interpretive' work, a key characteristic of the context and environment in which a significant number of cultural managers operate. There is therefore a potential empirical 'fit' with sensemaking that merits further exploration.

Second, if the focus is on managing rather than management; organising rather than organisation; a process-orientation rather than outcomes; understandings and meanings rather than definitions, checklists and routines; then this is an attempt to capture something that is constantly moving and emerging ("unarticulated ground", Weick, 2012, p. 102), which is a challenging thing to do. Instead, attention must be paid to "the entities and states [which] become the highlighted figure". It is only possible to convey "ineffable, tacit expertise...in fragmented form by drawing attention to salient features in episodes where the ineffable is performed" (p. 102); in other words, by bracketing cues and connecting them to frames. As a researcher, I have no choice but to be a sensemaker; I am involved in sensemaking whether I like it or not.

Third, if this is an investigation of what cultural managers do when they organise, and if organising is "sensemaking in action" then there is inevitably an engagement with cultural managers as sensemakers. Interest is primarily in "how they construct what they construct, why, and with what effects", which, according to Weick, "are the central questions for people interested in sensemaking" (Weick, 1995a, p. 4). As a researcher, I am thus looking at sensemaking *in* what they do in order to inform my sensemaking *about* what they do.

Fourth, there is an explicit, active, and indeed personal sensemaking *purpose* to the research. I am motivated by accounts of cultural management that do not quite make sense to me. I have noticed some things in an ongoing flow of events (thirty years in cultural management) which constitute surprises, a discrepant set of cues, things that don't fit when I try and connect them to the frames currently available to me. I want to find out what cultural managers do on a daily basis "in a way that is more inclusive and draws in other crucial elements of everyday life in [cultural] organizations which are overlooked by much of the [cultural management] literature" (after Pye, 2005, p. 37). I want to pay attention to the small – in scale and action – rather than rely on the large and hegemonic to make sense for me. Thus, I want to "broaden, multiply and update the number of cues with which we are willing to become acquainted...to provide a story [about cultural management] that can be acted on to provide a shape that is both generative and suitably complex" (Weick, 2012, p. 150) – in other words, through theorising, to shift the frame.

Here, then, there is resonance with sensemaking both as a resource *and* as a topic (Colville, Waterman & Weick, 1999; Weick, 2005). As a resource, sensemaking becomes integral to the ways in which I will conduct my research; it is exemplified in the doing of it. As a topic, it offers a perspective through which I might theorise a new understanding of 'what cultural managers do'. By deploying sensemaking in both these ways (simultaneously rather than sequentially) I have the means to keep moving between figure and ground; knowing how and knowing that; what the story might be (what is going on here) and how I might tell it; and between walking the talk and talking the walk.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 2**

This chapter has accomplished six things.

First, it has outlined the "foreshadowed problem" of my thesis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) and the imperative for my research. It has identified the themes of divide, difference, deficit and dauntlessness in the (i) theoretical literature and those of invisibility, informality and isomorphism in (ii) empirical studies of cultural management. This in turn has revealed both the gap in, *and* the potential for, research which examines 'what cultural managers do' (in contrast



to what they are told they could, should or fail to do) and which, importantly, taps into the voices and thoughts of cultural managers themselves. The case has also been made for a focus on those working in *micro-scale* theatre organisations in South West England, with the resultant findings being of particular relevance to the post-recession cultural ecology. The study thus intends to challenge, and then add a further dimension to, the cultural management field.

Second, it has focused attention on how cultural managers and cultural management are referred to and perceived in (iii) theatre and performance studies literature. Here, the themes of divide (between arts/management) and separation (between artists/managers) were most apparent, with the cultural manager's role being depicted in terms of practical support functions like budgeting, fundraising, scheduling and logistics. In addition, attention was drawn to the paucity of dialogue between the disciplinary fields of cultural management and theatre/performance studies even where areas of interest (e.g. audience) overlap.

Third, it has reflected on how the arts and particularly theatre are portrayed in 'the art of...' field of management and organisation studies. This highlights two things. First, the absence of cultural management as a focus of study within a field that explicitly examines the relationship between management and the arts, and second, the challenge of locating meaningfully, with partial and uncritical notions of theatre (in particular) which are brought in to management and organisation studies and then refracted out again to management *in* theatre.

Fourth, in consideration of the above, this chapter has begun to delineate something of the dysfunctional loop that can be woven between (i) theoretical *and* (ii) empirical accounts of the cultural management field; (iii) perceptions of 'what cultural managers do' as reflected in theatre and performance studies literature; and (iv) writing within the emerging tradition of 'the art of...' in management and organisation studies. This enquiry seeks to untangle that existing loop and see what might be woven in its place. It therefore hopes to speak to several readerships: cultural management scholars and practitioners; theatre and performance scholars; and management and organisation scholars.

Fifth, this literature review has drawn on research which posed a similar question (“what do managers do?”). It has also explored the shift from “systems-control” to “process-relational” thinking in management and organisation studies, as exemplified by the move towards gerund notions of *managing* and *organising*, a perspective little used in (though with arguably much potential for) the cultural management field.

Sixth, the chapter has considered organising as “sensemaking in action” and made the case for framing this research as a broad-based sensemaking enquiry. Here sensemaking is used as both a resource and a topic, with the former offering a way of helping to make sense of the research data (*sensetaking*), and the second providing a theoretical perspective that can be used to advance understanding of what cultural managers do (*sensegiving*). In other words, the first is a means of determining ‘what is going on here’ and the second is a route through which the ‘answer’ (however provisional) might be turned into a good, honest and plausible story for theorists and practitioners alike.

How that might be enacted is the subject of the next chapter, which details the study’s research methodology.

# Chapter 3: Research Methodology

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the research questions were addressed.

In the sections that follow, I examine my research philosophy and assumptions; relate them to the study design and associated methods for data collection and analysis; address issues of rigour, trustworthiness and ethics; and interweave throughout how this investigation was 'enacted'. Finally, I provide a lead-in to the analysis chapter.

### 3.1 Design of the study

The previous chapter has already laid some of the methodological ground for this enquiry. First, it is shaped by a social constructionist paradigm; second, the assumption of a sensemaking perspective has methodological as well as theoretical implications; and third, it is necessary to get 'up close and personal' with cultural managers in their specific organisational contexts, as a prerequisite for constructing a plausible account of what they do, how and why .

This is a **qualitative** enquiry, rather than a quantitative one. Its emphasis is not on hypothesis-testing, experiment, quantity or frequency. Instead it concentrates on "the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). In other words, it does not seek (quantitatively) to survey cultural managers to test their responses to a number of pre-determined competencies or set up an experiment to ascertain the relative success rates of one group of managers who had undergone formal fundraising training and those who had not. Rather the intention is (qualitatively) to understand more about the daily doings of cultural managers in a particular context (micro-scale theatre organisations), paying attention to how they interpret those experiences and what meanings they ascribe to them.

Qualitative research...consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible... This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret

phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

A choice of qualitative enquiry tends to be informed by certain philosophical assumptions on the part of the researcher, and as has already been intimated, this study is no exception.

Drawing on Collis and Hussey (2009, pp. 56-61) and Creswell (2007, pp. 16-19) these assumptions can be summarised as follows:

- *ontologically* (the nature of reality) – reality is subjective, multiple and shaped by our perceptions;
- *epistemologically* (what constitutes valid knowledge) – ‘reality’ is affected by the act of looking, listening and investigating, and the researcher keeps the distance between herself and the ‘participant’ as close as possible;
- *axiologically* (the role of values) – the researcher recognises the impact of her own values on what she sees and must be clear and open about ‘bias’;
- *rhetorically* (the language of research) – the researcher has a preference for writing in the first person and in a manner that is congruent with the focus of enquiry, in order to reflect the situational context and immediacy of her involvement;
- *methodologically* (the process of research) – the researcher favours an inductive approach with an emerging research design and a specific context, with the emphasis on seeking to understand ‘what is going on here’ by developing themes or patterns from ‘data’, resulting in plausible findings and conceptual insight.

A qualitative approach is further steered, shaped and refined by the **paradigm or worldview** (Kuhn, 1970) the researcher brings to it.

Paradigms matter because (to paraphrase Lincoln, 2010, p. 7) they say something important about where the researcher starts from, what kind of relationship she anticipates with others, how she sees knowledge, and how her overall approach will be characterised and handled.

Qualitative enquiry is informed by a range of worldviews. Historically, these have been grouped between positivism and interpretivism:

...as the extremities of a continuous line of paradigms...and as you move along the continuum, the features and assumptions of one paradigm are gradually relaxed and replaced by those of the next (after Morgan & Smircich, 1980, in Collis & Hussey, 2009, p. 57).

The idea here is that *quantitative* enquiry is located more towards the *positivist* end while *qualitative* studies are located more towards the *interpretivist* end. However, this is not necessarily clear cut (see Prasad's (2005) "qualitative positivism"); and the continuum has been "revised", as organisation and management studies has become complex and methodologically varied (Cunliffe, 2011). Some writers, like Creswell (2007, p. 11), reject the idea that qualitative research – as a "legitimate mode of social and human science exploration" – now needs to be defined "with apology or comparisons" to quantitative enquiry at all.

The literature on qualitative research groups and labels paradigms in a variety of ways, for example: postpositivism, constructionism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2007) and positivist/postpositivist, interpretive/constructivist, critical and postmodern/poststructural (Merriam, 2009). Each worldview comprises different belief systems, approaches to research, practices, techniques, intentions and styles of presentation: "a dazzling array of methodological choices to tackle a multitude of research questions and problems" (Prasad, 2005, p. 3). Over the past thirty years (since the advent of the "qualitative turn") this has "led to a powerful force for expanding knowledge of social processes...resulting in a stunning array of work" (Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). As is acknowledged, however, dazzling and powerful can easily give way to complicated and confusing. Prasad offers a way through the plethora of theoretical paradigms and methods when she talks of qualitative research encompassing a range of philosophical *traditions* (Prasad, 2005), each of which "intimates *an entire way of conducting scholarship* rather than merely offering a choice of technique or a uniform set of assumptions" (p. 8, italics in original). Prasad groups these as interpretive, deep structure, critical, and 'post' (i.e. postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism).

As indicated in the literature review and in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the scholarly position adopted here assumes the centrality of human interpretation to the development of knowledge and is specifically informed by

**social constructionism**, which has its origins in the European Social Science traditions (Schutz, 1967; Berger & Luckman, 1967).

Antithetical to objectivism, social constructionism is an ontological position:

...that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision... (Bryman, 2012, p. 33).

In research terms, this means that there has to be an emphasis on how participants view a particular situation, a recognition that resultant meanings are likely to be multiple rather than singular and negotiated socially rather than individually, with interaction a vital feature of the process. In addition, norms and values are highly significant, not as 'givens' but as aspects of organisational life that are continually negotiated. Furthermore, the researcher is more likely to develop conceptual insights and patterns of meaning inductively from data, rather than to start with a theory for deductive testing (Creswell, 2007, pp. 20-21).

Working within this tradition means that the researcher focuses principally on processes of interaction; the context (social, historical); her own position as enquirer (reflexivity), and ways of making sense of other people's sensemaking. The mention of **sensemaking** is particularly important here.

As set out in the literature review, if this is an investigation of what cultural managers do when they organise, and if organising is sensemaking in action, then this research is inevitably engaging with cultural managers as sensemakers. I am thus looking at sensemaking *in* what they do to inform sensemaking *about* what they do (so Colville et al.'s (1999) topic and resource again). Moreover, Weick himself is seen to locate very closely to a social constructivist paradigm in the vein of Berger and Luckman (1967) – see Hernes (2008).

Thus, my ontological and epistemological orientation towards qualitative research, the social constructivist worldview I bring with me, and the theoretical perspective (sensemaking) I am using to look, listen and think with in addressing my research questions are all of a piece: they are three closely

intertwined strands, which now need to be joined by a fourth: a congruent methodology (Morse & Richards, 2002, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 42).

### 3.2 Choice of methodology

In a review of research of sites where sensemaking occurs, and the methodologies deployed, Weick identifies several shared characteristics (1995a, pp. 172-173):

- investigators make an effort to preserve action that is situated in context;
- observers rely less on researcher-specified measures and more on what participants say and do in response to minimal prodding and pre-structuring;
- observers work in close rather than from the armchair;
- participants, rather than observers, define the work environment;
- findings are described in terms of patterns rather than hypotheses;
- explanations are tested as much against common sense and plausibility ...as against a priori theories;
- density of information and vividness of meaning are as crucial as precision and replicability;
- there tends to be intensive examination of a small number of cases, rather than the selective examination of a large number of cases...;
- sensemaking tends to be especially visible in the settings observed;
- settings are chosen more for their access to the phenomenon than for their representativeness;
- ...in all of these cases observers mobilize a set of methodological tactics that enables them to deal with meanings rather than with frequency counts.

The key words and phrases here are “action”, “context”, “what participants say and do”, “work[ing] in close”, “patterns of meaning”, “vividness” and “intensive examination” which – along with the focus of my questions – suggest a particular connection between sensemaking and **ethnography** as an interpretive tradition (Prasad, 2005).

Indeed, Van Maanen (1979, p. 54) maintains that the purpose of organisational ethnography is to “uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise

manage their day-to-day situation”. It’s all about “how members of a social group, through their participation in social process, enact their particular realities and endow them with meaning” (Rosen, 1991, p. 6): in other words, ethnography is largely a matter of sensemaking.

Ethnography, then, seems to offer a useful kind of methodological congruence and this is fleshed out in the paragraphs that follow. There is also an account of why and how a case study approach needs to be brought into the mix, before consideration of methods of data collection and analysis, and then an outline of how this enquiry was enacted in practice.

### **3.3 Ethnography**

Ethnography is about understanding human experience – how a particular community lives – by studying events, language, rituals, institutions, behaviours, artefacts and interactions (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 227).

It is particularly associated with in-depth fieldwork over time, participant observation, and the collection of data which will illuminate those issues which are of concern to the ethnographer.

As well as being conceptualised as a data collection method, ethnography is also associated with a method of data analysis (Rosen, 1991, p. 1); a richly written product, with the ethnographer as “teller of tales” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 81); and a “way of seeing” (Wolcott, 1999), a “particular way of engaging with the world around us” (Cunliffe, 2010, p. 233), and “a distinctive sensibility” towards to social world, with meaning and meaning-making to the fore (Yanow et al., 2012).

With its origins in colonial explorations of ‘strange’ cultures (and an administrative requirement to document ‘native’ cultures, the better to ‘oversee’ them) and early 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural anthropology (e.g. Lévi-Strauss; Mead), early ethnography sought to understand non-Western cultures from the Other’s point of view. By emphasising local cultural practices and the meaning associated with them (Prasad, 2005, p. 77), scholarly ethnography has been described as emphasising an approach based on *Verstehen* (understanding), or an *emic* (rather than an *etic* or external) perspective, the better to elucidate “actors’ internal logics or subjectivity” (Gill & Johnson, 2002, p. 226). The Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s focused anthropological methods on



urban and social issues closer to home, and since the 1950s and 1960s the ethnographic tradition has extended to other disciplines (e.g. organisation studies) and more everyday settings, from factories to offices, and education institutions to ballet companies.

There is now a more explicit recognition that working from “a room with a view” cannot be avoided in ethnographic research (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 226); tales tell as much about the teller and they do about the told; and fieldwork methods are commensurate with those interpretive procedures people use in their daily lives (Van Maanen, 1979). As Yanow (2009) notes, however, organisational ethnographers who have not been formally schooled in anthropology can still feel “methodological angst” with what might be termed ‘rigour-mortis’ setting in when interpretive accounts are scrutinised for ‘results’ and other measurable outputs.

For Cunliffe (2011, p. 227) good organisational ethnographies (e.g. Blau, 1963; Carlson, 1951; Dalton, 1959; Law, 1994; Roy, 1959; Stewart, 1967; Watson, 2001) are a bit like good mysteries, drawing the reader into the intricacies of organisational members’ daily lives, revealing insights about the doing of managing and how we think about organisations.

These descriptions point to the **characteristics of ethnography**, which are here outlined in more detail, together with some associated issues and tensions.

- ***Culture and context***

Ethnography is concerned with the study and representation of culture with a small ‘c’ (Van Maanen, 2006), which is “a distinctly modern idea of culture as something constructed (or construed)...by all self-identifying groups. Everyone these days...has a culture and more likely several cultures from which to draw meaning” (p. 15).

Wolcott (1987, p. 41) emphasises that culture is not simply lying about waiting to be found; instead it is “something that researchers attribute to a group when looking at patterns in their social world” (Creswell, 2007, p. 71). For Geertz (2003), culture equates with the “webs of significance” human beings both spin and are suspended in, and the analysis of it is all about an interpretive search for meaning.

In ethnography, the researcher's attention is drawn to the detail of people's actions, behaviours, routines, stories, habits, dress and their local interpretation. These are outer manifestations of, and clues to, those webs and their spinning. Nevertheless, such a focus on the local or situational should not cloud attention to the broader cultural context or the still larger "social organisation" (Watson, 2012). In other words, local interpretation and wider sensemaking (historical, political, social) are inextricably bound up with each other: the individual, collective, situational and public all interact in meaning-making. Culture is thus both shaping and shaped.

In terms of this enquiry it is also worth noting that not only are micro-scale theatre organisations engaged in *everyday culture* as indicated above, they are also quite explicitly and deliberately engaged in the creation, production, facilitation and dissemination of *culture as "an aesthetic or intellectual product"* (Bennett, 1995, p. 18, italics added). In both these ways signifying practices are central to their *culture work*.

- ***In-depth fieldwork over time***

Ethnography relies on the researcher working in close enough to those being studied to cultivate good relationships and to build a degree of familiarity and ease with the specifics of the culture under study. This frequently takes the form of participant observation, supplemented by (formal or informal) interviews, and document and artefact analysis, with notes, observations, impressions and reflections recorded in a fieldwork diary. The concern is with primary data, which are often necessarily gathered over time, in order to gain a focus on processes and the ongoing making of meanings. The knowledge ethnographers are after is more custom-made than off the peg and requires more than a quick snapshot or "quick description" of the field (Bate, 1997, as cited in Humphreys & Watson, 2009, p. 41).

...organisational ethnographers are cultural explorers, discovering how organizational actors make sense and get things done and how organizational communities and identities continually emerge over time (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 229).

- ***Making meanings intersubjectively***

Ethnographers are interested in “how people live their lives and make meanings *together* so they pay particular attention to interactions, written texts, talk, actions and language *between* people” (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 229 – italics added) in a culture sharing and shaping group. This does not mean, however, that they are in search of singular truths or meanings: they are much more concerned with “how...sociality is shaped and reshaped in the interactions and many voices and meanings within the research site” (p. 230) Making meaning is unavoidably multi-layered..

Furthermore, in studying one’s own culture, the researcher brings both a degree of familiarity and her own values, assumptions and sensibilities to bear, all of which inevitably impact on her seeing and saying, which cannot but be selective. The presence of the researcher as close-in observer, the act of being there and looking (the gaze) are also likely to have an impact on the people, activities and context being observed and this needs to be borne in mind too. Clarity and transparency of process thus redouble in importance.

Making sense of other people’s sensemaking, while requiring the researcher to get in close, should not to be confused with pretence at mind-reading. It *necessitates* an ongoing tension between distance and proximity, total involvement and a certain detachment, whilst accepting that the researcher – and her luggage – are always present and implicated. This needs to be acknowledged and incorporated into the study as fully as possible.

- ***Reflexivity***

Alongside a focus on culture, meaning making and in-depth fieldwork, another central tenet of interpretive ethnography is the reflexivity of the researcher i.e. the recognition that “we are part of the social world we study” (Hammersely & Atkinson, 1983, p. 14). This means that the researcher needs to be upfront and transparent about her ‘workings’; her active involvement in, for example, the co-creation of data and the writing of accounts which construct the organisational realities they also report on.

The ethnographer’s own taken-for-granted understandings of the social world under scrutiny are also tied closely to the nature and quality of the data produced (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 547).

In this research, there is a particular need for reflexive vigilance in that I have had long term professional involvement in the world I am studying, which could lead me to see only what I wish to see and skew my analysis so that I simply present an overly positive and self-justifying account. Finally, it is important to recognise that reflexivity is not the sole preserve of the researcher, and that those who are the focus of interest are also “fully engaged reflexive subjects” who are likely, actively and knowingly, to collaborate in the enquiry at a conceptual as well as an experiential level (Marcus, 2007).

- ***‘Thick description’***

For Geertz (2003, p. 145) “what defines ethnography...is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description””. “Thin description” (Ryle and Geertz again) might provide an account of someone’s eye-lid twitching, but it is thick description that portrays it as a wink, and a particular kind of wink at that. An avuncular wink or a flirtatious wink is suspended in a web of significance, woven by those who are party to it and who ‘get it’ as such. So the important thing is not the eye-lid movement per se, but what that particular eye-lid movement *means* within a culture-sharing group. And winking – as an example – is likely to be only one “structure of signification” in amongst lots of others that a group constructs and shares, all of which are layered, mixed up and twisted together.

Thick description demands that the researcher unravel different clusters of meaning and interest while simultaneously tracing their interconnections with each other (Prasad, 2005, p. 81).

Thick description is about trying to convey the multi-layered richness of (and often tensions between) shared patterns of language, action, beliefs and feelings through researcher accounts, which – it must be remembered – always start with “*our own interpretations of what our informants are up to, or think they are up to*” (Geertz, 2003, p. 55 – italics in original). Thick descriptions do not simply appear as a result of detailed observation; they are filtered, fashioned and fabricated.

- ***Fashioning and telling stories***

Producing ‘an ethnography’ is thus as much about writing as it is about data collection and analysis (Prasad, 2005, p. 82). It is about generating conceptual

insights and weaving some kind of authentic and plausible story from copious data; something that enables the reader (and there may be several readerships) to see *differently* something that is familiar, taken for granted, or ignored. While there is heavy reliance on inductive ways of working with primary data to achieve this, this does not mean that the researcher eschews everything deductive. More often she shuttles between the two, intertwining data with theoretical tales as she goes along to see what transpires. Theory (or at least theorising) is thus an input to, and an outcome of, ethnographic stories.

The best ethnographies are a good, engaging and persuasive read (see Van Maanen, 1973), in that they work rhetorically and artfully (Watson, 2000), inviting the reader to interpret them according to their own background and experience. In theatre, some argue that 'meaning' is created in the act of witnessing a performance; in ethnography it is made interactively in the process of reading.

For Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993, p. 598) this presents one of the biggest challenges in ethnographic work.

How does one convince readers that knowledge or a "finding" is worth paying attention to when it is (a) developed from a field-dependent situation incorporating a particular social-historical context and the personal realities of the researchers as well as those of the actors they study...(b) when it is offered as an interpretation rather than "absolute knowledge" that seeks the accurate and definitive account of a particular system ...and (c) when it provides readers with a reality portrayed through description and conceptually-mediated analysis of social experiences rather than a depiction of reality itself.

They suggest three ways of meeting this challenge: authenticity, plausibility and criticality, which, when approached reflexively, offer a different way of building "authorial authority" than that conveyed by "a certainty based on absolute truth" (p. 598). By authenticity, they mean conveying a sense that the researcher was actually there; being clear about the ways in which data were collected and analysed and being open and genuine about the researcher's perspective. Plausibility is about getting the right degree of distance between the descriptive and the conceptual, to create something interesting and distinctive (rather than banal or outlandish) for the reader or readers. Criticality

is about the persuadability of the text and its capacity to get the reader to think about something in a new way, “to reframe the way in which organizational phenomena are perceived and studied” (p. 600) – not least through a credible literature review and the clear identification of a distinctive contribution.

These three considerations are particularly challenging in this study, which has potential readerships from cultural management, theatre and performance studies, and organisation and management studies. Inhabitants of these three scholarly fields are rarely in the same room together and they make for unusual Procrustean bedfellows. They bring different assumptions, preoccupations and expectations with them, so the lenses through which they will read the text (assuming they wish to at all!) are likely to be very varied.

Challenges aside, the appropriateness of an ethnographic approach to this enquiry is clear. Ethnography as an interpretive tradition is congruent with the research questions and the kind of phronetic insights I want to build about ‘what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations in South West England’. It is impossible to answer these questions *without* looking closely at the very specific (cultural) contexts in which these managers work. In many ways, it is the very specificity of their working context and its relationship with their thoughts, ideas and doings that is missing from prevailing theoretical accounts of cultural management. The intention, however, is not to conduct an ethnographic study in order to create a picture of a whole culture-sharing group (though such an approach might be entirely appropriate for a future enquiry). Rather, it is to get close to individual managers *in* their culture sharing groups, as the preferred way of addressing the research questions. This will better enable me to see how each inflects the other, and to explore how the former – as cultural beings – make meaning in, through, and about what they do in the worlds in which they operate and have a hand in creating. This, in tandem with the existing body of knowledge as explored in the literature review, is what will enable the process of building conceptual insights about what these cultural managers do. This enquiry is therefore more properly labelled an **ethnographic case study**.

This may all seem tautologous – after all, most ethnographies are studies of particular cases (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, treat this as self-evident). However the obverse is not always true: case studies are not necessarily

ethnographies; they could, for example, take a quantitative approach. The point is that ethnography – as has been set out above – is associated with a particular kind of focus and methodology (participant observation and prolonged involvement in the field leading to some kind of inductive account of a culture-sharing group, which relies heavily on thick description).

A case study, on the other hand, is more associated with the selection or identification of a case or cases: “it is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (Stake, 2005, p. 443), and what is to be studied is some kind of “bounded system” (Smith, 1978) which could be an event, an organisation or a person. “The unit of analysis, *not* the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 41, italics in original), so while a cultural manager would constitute a case, cultural management or managing would not. The methods selected for a case study enquiry would then depend on the questions asked (i.e. what the researcher wants to find out).

Case study and ethnography are quite a common combination because they bring different, yet complementary things to the table: a bounded system meets a particular focus and approach to in-depth study. Indeed there can be overlapping characteristics: a qualitative case study, like ethnography, relies on observation, interviews and documents as methods of data collection, and the resultant case study – as product – is an in-depth thick description often comprising the identification of themes as an aid to understanding the case in question, which can then bring about new meaning.

Case studies can be singular and *intrinsic*, where the aim is to understand that particular case better; singular and *instrumental*, where the primary intention is to provide insight into an issue, so the case itself is of more secondary interest; and *multiple* or collective where the interest lies in what the study of a smaller group of cases might suggest (theoretically) about a larger group (Stake, 2005, pp. 444-446).

In multicase study research, the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together. They may be members of a group or examples of a phenomenon (Stake, 2006: 5-6, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 49).

The research questions in this study imply an interest in single cases within their own *culture-sharing* groups, and a curiosity about cultural managers in micro-scale theatre organisations as a *categorical* group.

My enquiry is thus a **multiple ethnographic case study** encompassing several cultural managers (cases or multiple bounded systems), what they do in their micro-scale theatre organisations (culture-sharing groups) *and* thereby what this study might suggest about others in the same ‘class’ or ‘scale’ of organisation (a larger categorical group).

This does not mean falling into the trap of inappropriate empirical generalisation (extrapolating from the local to the universal), or capitulating to positivist expectations of ‘validity’ or ‘reliability’; rather it will enable meaningful talk about activities, processes, theory and difference in a way that rigorously addresses all the questions, including – essentially – the last two:

- *What* do cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre or organisations (in South West England)?
- *Why* do they do what they do?
- *How* do they do what they do?
- In what ways might an analysis of what they do *inform* talk in and about cultural management?
- To what other theoretical conversations might such an analysis *contribute*?

Having examined the research design and methodology, attention now turns to case selection, data collection and analysis, and ethical issues.

### **3.4 Case selection**

The researcher examines various interests in the phenomenon, selecting a case of some typicality but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer the *opportunity to learn*... Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is often more important (Stake, 2005, pp. 450-451, italics in original).

First of all there needs to be **purposeful sampling** in order to find the cases. This means selecting cases “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study”



(Creswell, 2007, p. 125) and necessitates decisions about who, what, where, when and how many.

There is a bewildering array of types of purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These range from maximum variation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to convenience or pragmatic sampling, and from selection according to specific criteria, to the identification of cases which are deemed typical of a particular phenomenon. There is even snowball sampling, which involves asking people who or what might make an interesting case and following up these leads which then unearth even more potential cases.

Here, the basis for purposeful sampling (a mix of criterion and convenience) was largely embedded in and drawn from the research questions.

Since this was to be a multiple ethnographic case study of cultural managers 'doing' cultural management, my cases were going to be *individuals* whose executive responsibility for managing a cultural organisation was conveyed through their job title. In addition, for reasons outlined earlier, they had to be working in *micro-scale theatre organisations, engaged in contemporary, experimental work* and located in the *South West* of England. Here, 'micro-scale' is taken to mean organisations employing a core staff of fewer than five people. 'Contemporary and experimental' is used to denote theatre-making that explicitly questions, opposes, extends or redeploys:

...some of the fundamental beliefs that appear to underpin conventional practices of much twentieth- and twenty-first-century theatre-making, such as accepting the director as visionary leader or author/*auteur*, using text as starting point, valuing psychological realism, structuring narrative around conflict, and practising theatre itself as an established set of conventional practices (Harvie & Lavender 2010, p. 2).

Finally, 'South West' is understood as the official designation which brings together the counties of Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Somerset and the unitary authorities of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, North Somerset, Bournemouth, Poole, Plymouth, Torbay and Wiltshire.

Ethnographic studies generally focus on one culture-sharing group, and case studies usually include up to four or five cases (Creswell, 2007).

I decided on *three* as a manageable case set for in-depth examination (Fitzgibbon 2001, p. 40) over the *same time period*, August– December 2011. This was to enable me to focus on the cultural and contextual detail of each case and to facilitate ongoing comparison and contrast between cases. The three I chose were sampled to allow for the possibility of similar *and* different perspectives on the same phenomenon, taking issues of balance, comparability, variety and resource constraint into account (see below).

The three individuals selected were cultural managers occupying senior executive positions in micro- scale theatre organisations in Bristol (KK@THB), Plymouth (SS@BTH) and Redruth (AU@MTH) respectively. This degree of *regional spread* was an important consideration, not in any representational sense, but to ensure diversity of location within a bounded – though large – area. Restricting the geographical reach to one region was also intended to bring gains in terms of “depth over what one might lose by foregoing the possibility of wider comparison” (Fitzgibbon 2001, p. 40).

All were selected from the *subsidised theatre sector* in the South West for reasons of contextual “replication” (Yin, 2003, p. 47), not least because such organisations tend to be at the sharp end of issues around divide, difference, deficit and dauntlessness, and the focus of attention in existing empirical research relating to invisibility, informality and isomorphism. Each organisation was and is principally supported by *Arts Council England*, which is the lead body charged with developing the arts in England and whose mission is “to get great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people’s lives” (Arts Council England, 2010).

In 2010 the Arts Council launched a *National Portfolio Funding Programme* to replace its existing arrangements for regularly funded organisations (which were to end on 31 March 2012).

Prior to the start of the 2012/2013 financial year 13 South West theatre organisations were awarded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status, of which three were newly brought in to the regularly funded fold. Of these thirteen, five were micro-scale and based, respectively, in Swindon (1), Bristol (2), Exeter (1) and Cornwall (1). Having investigated all five, I narrowed the final choice down to three, which, between them offered a good range of location, age of manager and organisation, funding history, target constituency and type

of engagement with contemporary and experimental theatre. In respect of NPO status:

- KK@THB had secured regular funding for the first time;
- SS@BTH, formerly a regularly funded organisation, had entered the portfolio under a 'combined arts' banner since it has both a theatre and dance remit;
- AU@MTH became an NPO having previously been a regularly funded client.

This means that all three organisations were seen to have a significant track record of achievement and robust potential to achieve Arts Council goals. Thus, none of them could be regarded as being 'at risk' or 'in crisis', and all had management structures and processes that were judged by the Arts Council to be sound (this being part of the assessment process). There was a useful degree of experiential *commonality* between them, since throughout the period of enquiry, each was in the process of becoming 'NPO ready' in advance of an April 2012 start date. Furthermore, the managers of these organisations were all *women*, a factor that was not part of the criteria for selection. Statistically, though, small scale creative and cultural organisations are more likely to be managed by women (Dodd, Hawkes & Sullivan, 2008, p. 37), and this was the case with all five small scale theatre NPOs mentioned above. This factor is a salient feature of this study and will be returned to later.

At the same time, each individual manager brought *variety* in terms of age, experience, time in post, job focus and specific responsibilities (with the potential for differences in their activity, function and stories). In addition, although all three organisations work in the small scale theatre arena, each does so from a different base and offers a particular specialism. THB is a city-region theatre development agency focusing on producing and artist/company support; BTH is an inner-city venue promoting and facilitating new theatre (and dance) work, with young people taking the lead; and MHT is a rural touring theatre company taking big productions to small (mainly outdoor) venues.

Further to the criteria above, I filtered the potential cases in large part through knowledge and contacts built up in the region over the past 30 years, relying on "...experience and intuition [to] help ...make a good selection" (Stake 2005, p.

451). I also hoped that this insider connection to the field would help in persuading these colleagues to take part in the research and to show and tell in an open and trusting way. While I had known one of the individuals professionally for some time (SS@ BTH), I had not met the other two and knew of them and their organisations' work by reputation only. In addition, the three individuals had heard of, but did not know each other.

Overall this mix of cultural managers constituted a 'fit-for-purpose' sample, which could offer both interest and balance and variety to an in-depth investigation of 'what cultural managers do' in regionally-based micro-scale theatre organisations. It was by being in close proximity – over time – to these individuals, and their combination of similarity and difference, that I hoped to create the opportunity to learn more about what they do.

### **3.5 The initial approach**

In the summer of 2011, I emailed all three managers to see if they would each be interested in taking part in the research during the autumn (see Appendix I).

I also set out my own background and (with regard to the two potential cases I did not know) the names of mutual acquaintances (colleagues) who could verify that I was "not a mad axe murderer".

Responses to this exploratory email were helpfully positive and immediate:

Sometimes I don't get the chance to pick up on the really interesting stuff so I thought I'd just call to fix a time to meet, rather than embark on an endless exchange of emails (KK).

What an interesting request! I would be delighted to be part of your research (SS).

Thanks for your email and for considering me for this project, which sounds very interesting. I think it would be worth us having a chat about it – because I never know if I really am doing anything/everything properly etc.! I would want you to make sure I was the right person... (AU).

I had face-to-face inception meetings with each of the three to answer questions and cover practical issues. We discussed what sorts of things I might observe to give the most comprehensive insight into the range of their day to day work and agreed a timetable of observation days. In order to cross-refer days with

activities, KK sourced her 'to do' list and diary; SS focused on days when she already had meetings of various sorts scheduled; and AU looked for days when she was most likely to be seeing the full range of people she related to and worked with in the course of her duties. Protocols were agreed, consent forms signed and all three cases forwarded a range of background material about themselves and their organisation so I could familiarise myself prior to the first visit.

### **3.6 Data collection**

The word 'data' lends to research an image of neutrality in the sense that findings appear independent of the way in which we arrive at them... In addition, most books assume that there exists a chronology whereby 'data collection' precedes 'data analysis' (Hernes, 2008, pp. 145-146).

Before addressing the data collection methods I used, I need to be clear about what I mean by 'data', what data I intended to collect, and the relationship between data 'collection' and 'analysis'.

For Merriam (2009, p. 85) data are the bits of information found in the setting, and it is the researcher who determines whether that information is to be used as data or not. It is perhaps more useful to talk of data being *selected*, because that stresses that active and engaged role of the researcher, something that has particular resonance for my enquiry. These are features we allow – through selection – to capture our attention (Hernes, 2008, p. 147), and in this sense they are more "capta" than data (p. 148). So when the word data is used in what follows, the intention is for the spectre of 'capta' to loom large.

Data in qualitative research tends to take the form of words – descriptions of people's activities, actions and behaviours; quotations from people about their lives, work, beliefs and experiences; and extracts and passages from written documents (Patton, 2002). Data-collecting is then about asking questions, watching what is going on, and reading and reviewing material.

It is virtually impossible to separate data collecting from data analysis in practice, because sensemaking doesn't start or stop; it is ongoing.

Analysis begins with the first interview, the first observations, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches...direct the next stage of data collection...It is an interactive process throughout that allows the

investigator to produce believable and trustworthy findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 165).

So, addressing issues of data collection and analysis in separate and sequential sections here is more for reasons of clarity of explanation than an indication of process in practice.

### **3.7 Data collecting methods**

Both ethnography and case study research involve a range of data collecting procedures in order to build up an in-depth picture. These comprise observations, interviews, documents and artefacts. All four are used here, with a particular emphasis on the first two as primary fieldwork methods.

- ***Observation***

Observation in an everyday sense is what we do all the time as part of our sensemaking toolkit. In interpretive research, it becomes more conscious and systematic, because it is both a way of addressing research questions and a reflexive way-marker for producing plausible findings (Merriam, 2009, pp. 117-119). It demands selective attentiveness, noticing and paying attention to things that the person or people observed may be doing in a routine or unconscious way, things that are embedded, constructed and habitual within a particular cultural context.

When considering ethnographic observation, a decision is usually made about the extent to which the researcher will participate in the subject's world. In participant observation, it is argued, she attempts to take part as fully as possible so that she experiences what happens as a member of the group, thus enabling her to access what people 'actually' do (Gill & Johnson, 2002, p. 145). The supposed risk, however, is that the researcher becomes so caught up in her subject's day-to-day work-life that 'dispassionate' distance become impossible.

At the other end of the spectrum is non-participant observation, where direct contact and interaction with subjects is eschewed in favour of a more distanced overview. Here, the drawbacks are deemed to be insufficient proximity to the "cultural underpinnings of subjects' overt behaviours and actions" (p. 145) which can lead to thin findings which say more about the researcher than the researched.

In between these two extremes, Gold (1958) maintains there are two further roles: participant as observer and observer as participant, each of which allows for a little more flexibility and room for manoeuvre.

It is arguable whether a strict distinction between these positions can be sustained in practice, however, as all social research involves some degree of participation and it is futile to pretend that the researcher can remain in any way separate from the enquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 18).

Far from being wholly 'outside' or entirely 'inside', the interpretive researcher is selecting and interpreting as she goes along, comparing what she sees and hears to what she knows, believes and feels.

Bearing all of this in mind, I chose – reflexively – to engage in a particular type of observation: **shadowing**, or following each of my cases around during their working day. As previously mentioned, the primary focus was cultural managers working (organising, managing) in their culture-sharing groups, rather than the culture-sharing groups per se, so shadowing seemed an appropriate way to proceed.

As Czarniawska (2008) notes, this can lead to the formation of a useful twosome:

This is mutual observation, an establishing of similarities and differences; then there is a focus created by the movements of the person shadowed, and the double perception of a kind – the researcher guesses (and asks about) perceptions of events being perceived as well (2008, pp. 10-11).

Shadowing in this way implies ongoing re-negotiation of access and the continual shifting of the subject's "perception field...into which the researcher can peek" (p. 11). It also allows for informal conversation between meetings and other activities without having to wait for a scheduled interview.

I determined that the creation of a twosome arrangement would reinforce that this was not a policing or evaluative exercise and I was conscious of Czarniawska's notion that being observed in this way can give people a morale and status boost. In addition I intended that an explicit shadowing arrangement would make me less of a threatening presence to those with whom my cases were working. In the event, after one of my cases introduced me as her 'stalker',

this became the label I and they used throughout the fieldwork period to dissipate others' anxiety.

Shadowing was specified in my initial approach to the three cases and I was keen to spend up to 40 hours with each cultural manager, spread over the fieldwork period (August – December 2011). This amount of time was proposed for three reasons: 40 hours equates with a 'standard' working week; there is a precedent (Mintzberg, 1973 – although he concentrated each case observation into a literal working week); and I felt that this would be tolerable for my cases and manageable for me. I also wanted to observe each case in parallel, to allow for concurrent reflection on both within-case and cross-case 'doings', and to compare, contrast and query activities and processes in their cultural context as I went along.

The initial observation sessions were used to determine what I was going to pay attention to when observing my cases at work (so action, activities, behaviours, interactions) and over time (processes or organising and managing). The more detailed checklist that emerged was very close to that summarised by Merriam (2009, pp. 120-121): the physical setting; who was present (and why); what people were wearing; the nature of the activity (e.g. planned/unplanned); the timing and duration; the mode and pattern of talk; what was going on; the relationship between the activity and the context (local and external); the content of the exchanges (who said what); silences and body language, and my own behaviour and reactions.

Two **recording** mechanisms were used.

The first was a hard back A4 notebook for each case, with pages divided into two columns; one for descriptive notes and the other for reflective notes. Each observation session was given a 'header', detailing who, what, when and where and so on. The left hand column was used to summarise the flow and sequence of what was going on, while the right hand one provided space for thoughts, feelings and reactions to what was happening, and any points to wonder about or check on later (e.g. anything that seemed comparable to something that had happened with another case, or any potential links with the literature). Also included were end-of-observation-day reflections.



Second, on some occasions (with permission) it was possible to audio-record meetings, which meant I could gather a more verbatim sense of the ebb and flow of a conversation, to include tone, balance between informal/formal etc. and the relationships between my cases and others. This resulted in 21 hours of transcribed material – an average of seven hours per organisation.

- ***Observation in practice***

KK was shadowed for a total of 37.5 hours over seven separate days between 2 August and 6 December 2011; SS for a total of 40 hours over six days between 11 October and 13 December 2011; and AU for a total of 32 hours over seven days between 18 August and 8 December 2011. This represents the maximum amount of time each case was able to commit, bearing in mind the different priorities they were juggling at different times. SS was not able to participate until October due to work commitments during the Edinburgh Festival, followed by a period of annual leave.

- ***Interviews***

A research interview is a particular type of conversation between researcher and participant and a major source of data in building an understanding of a phenomenon and addressing research questions.

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe...The purpose of interviewing...is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 2002, pp. 340-341).

Interviews are about getting people to describe the view from their hilltop and the meanings they attach to it: how do I know what I think until I see what I say?

Different categorisations of interviews abound. They can be highly structured (like a survey, where all interviewees are asked exactly the same questions); semi-structured (a more flexible mix of structured and more loosely worded questions, allowing the researcher to pick up on particular events, new ideas or things that the interviewee says); or unstructured (where the researcher does not necessarily know in advance what the discussion topic might be). They can be structured according to an underlying philosophical position, a particular disciplinary approach, or in terms of the number of people involved. The bottom line, however, is that any interview is a social interaction and is inevitably 'made' by *both* researcher and respondent.

Aside from the conversations that took place in the course of my shadowing (to talk about what had been going on), each case was interviewed informally after the first couple of observation days to check out how they were feeling about the process and what they had found themselves thinking about or reflecting on during those initial sessions. Then towards the end of the fieldwork period, I held a semi-structured interview with each manager to invite them to talk about what their work and the organisation meant to them, to pick up on particular issues for further discussion, to begin to check out their responses to some of the themes and ideas that I was picking up/selecting from the shadowing experience, to ask them what I might have missed (from the range of their 'doings') in the course of my time with them, and to check if there was anything they particularly wanted to add that they hadn't had the opportunity to bring up. The schedule of interview issues/questions can be found at Appendix 3.

All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. After each interview, I reviewed the exchange in the A4 notebook kept for each case.

- ***Interviews in practice***

I interviewed KK on two occasions (21 November and 6 December 2011) for a period totalling 3.0 hours; SS on two occasions (11 October and 13 November 2011) for a period totalling 1.75 hours; and AU on two occasions (16 November and 8 December 2011) for a period totalling 2.75 hours.

- ***Documents***

The term 'documents' encompasses everything from diaries, letters and emails, official papers (proposals, reports, agendas and minutes), marketing materials (brochures, websites), press coverage (reviews, editorials, articles), to CVs, visuals (videos, photographs) and artefacts (objects, notice-boards i.e. things in the setting) (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Documents can pre-date observation and interviews to provide background and contextual information, and they can be generated during the period of study to be considered alongside the other empirical material (triangulation). They are not data in themselves, but (like interviewing and observing) they can be used for data selecting and analytic purposes.

Like fieldwork data, documents need to be collected and used systematically (according to the purpose of the study), and the process should also allow for happenstance and reflection along the way.

Once again, the particular value of documents in interpretive research is not that they provide evidence of 'truth', but that they are always partial accounts or perspectives, which can be juxtaposed with others and wondered about. Official documents, for example, say something about a culture-sharing group in an outward facing way, which it is interesting to compare with inward facing exchanges. So, useful questions about each (written) document include: where did it come from (and when), who wrote it, for what purpose and to whom, what other documents might have contributed to it, and is it confidential?

Having amassed a range of documents, it is good practice to categorise and 'code' them in terms of the meaning they seem to be conveying, the relationships they suggest, and the connection or contrast that can be made with other 'capta', both on a within-case and cross-case basis.

- ***Collecting documentation in practice***

A range of public and internal documents was collected from my cases, before, during and after the observations and interviews. These comprised four types: information about the individual cultural manager (CV and any published information about them); their job (job description, person specification etc.); their day-to-day work (emails sent during an agreed time period, a sample copy of a 'to do' list, agendas and minutes/reports of meetings) and their organisation (plans, reports, funding bids, information leaflets etc.). I was not denied access to any documentation I requested. A full list is set out at Appendix 2.

As an example of accompanying happenstance, I did not set out to collect samples of email correspondence. One of my cases (AU) – aware that she was going to be spending some time at her desk and concerned that I 'might not have enough to do' – suggested that she copy me in for an hour (in real time) to her 'sent' emails so that I could take a look at the range of subject-matter and the variety of people she was in contact with. This turned out to be a very useful indication of the kinds of communication style she used and the ways in which she built and maintained relationships. I asked my other cases if they would mind doing the same, and they all obliged.

Finally I took photographs of each case's office space and environs, and any particular artefacts that caught my attention, to provide a further (subjective) perspective on their respective working contexts and cultures (see Figures 1-3).

All documentation was filed and categorised in hard copy (on a per case and topic basis) to facilitate easy within-case and cross-case analysis.

### **3.8 Approach to data analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research is a process of making *meaning* out of data to answer research questions: it is sense making par excellence. Just as data are not lying about waiting to be found, answers (or rather themes, patterns or findings) are not languishing ready-formed either: both are selected and constructed. Data analysis is an active, flexible and systematic process that involves lots of iterative movement between cases and data sets, in order to build theory that is 'good' because it is a close and plausible fit with the data.

At its most basic, this process involves the organisation of data for analysis, the identification and classification of codes and themes from the data and then the representation of the data in a discussion (Creswell, 2007).

Such a simple description, however, belies the minefield that data analysis can represent and the **issues and challenges** that lie in the researcher's path. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

First there is the ever-present pull of "positivist anxiety" (Prasad, 2005), the enduring suspicion that qualitative research and the quality of theory produced are not quite up to the mark.

Contemporary ethnography is [still] not valued [in some academic circles] as producing rich intricate accounts of everyday organisational life, but instead seen pejoratively ...as having a "subjective take" on the specific context under study, leading to findings that are not generalizable, valid or "true" knowledge (Cunliffe, 2010, p. 226).

Likewise, case study research has been the subject of continuing myths and misunderstandings (Flyvberg, 2004). Sometimes it is difficult to keep hold of the important and perfectly legitimate differences between the natural and social sciences, the different kind of phenomena they explore, and the different kinds of knowledge they set out to produce.

Prasad (2005) counsels against an “anything goes” atheoretical approach to bypassing the strictures of positivism. Indeed, there is a plethora of analytical roadmaps and theory-building processes which an ethnographic multiple case study researcher might adopt in order to generate conceptual insight that is accurate, parsimonious, general and useful (Weick, 1979). For example, Eisenhardt (1989, p. 532) – albeit in positivist vein – offers a process of building theory from case study research which takes the reader from specifying the research questions to reaching closure and which is highly iterative and linked to data. Langley (1999) suggests mixing and matching from seven ‘sensemaking’ strategies (e.g. narrative, grounded theory, synthetic) to help structure the material and enable the researcher to pay attention to different things at different stages of the analytical process. Creswell (2007, p. 151) describes the process as a choreographed spiral, moving through different loops from data managing to reading/memoing, to describing and classifying, and finally to representing and visualising the findings.

Within these processes, however, there are important practical tensions to navigate.

A central challenge in qualitative case study research lies in: “moving from a shapeless data spaghetti toward some kind of theoretical understanding that does not betray the richness, dynamism and complexity of the data but that is understandable and potentially useful to others” (Langley, 1999, p. 694).

Sometimes there is a difficult balance to be struck between showing the data and talking about it: thick description on its own does not constitute analysis, while leaping too early into theorising can mask some of the steps taken to get there (Pratt, 2009). Furthermore, elements of data collection, data analysis and writing up often go on simultaneously, so separating them out can be tricky (Creswell, 2007).

In addition, process data tend to be eclectic, drawing in phenomena such as changing relationships, thoughts, feelings and interpretations (Langley, 1999, pp. 691-694), so detecting and then theorising from patterns is far from easy. There are also the accompanying book-end risks of a) over-complication due to a desire to include everything, and b) the production of narrow and idiosyncratic theory with insufficient scope for ‘generalisation’ (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547).

Finally, there is the linked and inevitable tension between “divergence into new

ways of understanding the data and convergence into a single theoretical framework” (p. 546).

And if that weren't enough, there is no universally agreed definition of theory (Corley & Gioia, 2011), nor is there comfortable consensus about what constitutes a theoretical contribution – i.e. “what signifies a significant theoretical (as opposed to an empirical or a methodological) advancement in our understanding of a phenomenon?” (p. 12). Moreover (and in an effort to follow Lewin's (1951, p. 486) dictum that “nothing is quite so practical as a good theory”), coming up with a conceptual insight that speaks meaningfully to both practitioners (in my case, cultural managers) and scholars is easier said than done. Value for one constituency does not necessarily equate with value for the other. In short, there is the ever present danger of things getting lost *in*, or even *before* translation from an empirical to a theoretical milieu and vice versa (Shapiro, Kirkman & Courtney, 2007). The risk – to use a traditional Yorkshire saying – is to end up with ‘neither nowt nor summat’.

At the same time, it is important to remember some of the particular **benefits** (and possibly even pleasures) that accrue from qualitative data analysis.

First, in terms of this enquiry, it could be argued that “the conflict inherent in the process is likely to generate the kind of novel theory which is desirable when extant theory seems inadequate” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 548) to explain a phenomenon – in this instance, what cultural managers do.

Second, finding a plausible answer to a qualitative research question (like ‘what do cultural managers do?’) cannot be done without staying close to the “richness, dynamism and complexity” of the data *and* a variety of theoretical possibilities *in order to* draw together data spaghetti into something that is “understandable and potentially useful to others” (Langley, 1999, p. 694).

Third, the implicit exhortation to tell a new and interesting story (or re-tell an old one in an interesting way) and the explicit requirement to exercise “disciplined imagination” and at some point to take an “uncodifiable creative leap” (Weick, 1989), serves to coat the theorizing ‘pill’ with enough sugar for the researcher (or this researcher, at least) to *want* to enable the reader “to see [a particular bit of] the world, and not just the literature, in a new way” (Siggelkow, 2007, p. 23).

Fourth, Weick (1995b) gives a reminder that theorising (as opposed to theory) is a highly contextualised *process* that involves a range of activities, including abstracting, generalising, relating, selecting, explaining, synthesising and idealising, with emergent ‘products’ (e.g. thematic headings) constituting progressive markers *on the way* to theory. This means that qualitative data analysis lends itself to interpretive bricolage, montage, and legitimate movement between different perspectives, which, it can be argued, gives the exercise much more room for manoeuvre.

So how does all this translate into a step-by-step process of data analysis that will enable me to avoid drowning in data, and to plot a systematic, yet flexible, iterative and reflexive path between data and a plausible, more interesting understanding of what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations?

- ***Overall approach to data analysis***

A decision was made to present, analyse and interpret the data through a combination of a) within-case thick description, b) cross-case pattern-searching, and c) iteratively shaping themes and concepts. Here both b) and c) allow for the enfolding of and “constant comparison” with the literature. This was to ensure that insights could emerge not only from the data (induction) and the theory (deduction), but also from abduction, in other words “using the theory with the data in imaginative way” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, as cited in Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 71). By these means it was hoped to build a high degree of ‘accuracy’ by “remaining...deeply rooted *in* the data”; and to facilitate the “development...of parsimonious theoretical generalisations” (Langley, 1999, p. 706, italics added) *from* the data and literature; whilst leaving enough room to exercise Weick’s “disciplined imagination” (1989). This bears some similarity to Pettigrew’s (1997, p. 339) three stage scheme for analysing processual data in case study research: a search for patterns within and across cases; a focus on mechanisms that underlie those observed patterns; and deductive as well as inductive pattern recognition to link everything back to the purpose of the research.

The intertwined steps in the process were as follows:

- ***Organising the data***

As mentioned, field notes from observation of each case were recorded in separate A4 notebooks. I had help with transcription (using a custom-made format as detailed earlier) and the resultant (hard copy) records were stored in case- and date-order in a large lever-arch file. Hard copies of all documents were similarly filed in case- and type-order. Notes from concurrent (post-literature review) reading were also printed off and catalogued by theme.

Such reliance on paper copies may seem distinctly 20<sup>th</sup> century, and while everything that existed online was also filed online, it was easier – and more helpfully tactile – to be able to locate, cross-refer and move things across and around a large table.

- ***Reading, describing and memoing***

The 'data set' for this enquiry comprised the following: field notes, audio transcription (21 hours' worth of meetings, 7.5 hours of one-on-one interviews), documents, artefacts and notes as detailed above.

I read and re-read the data from each case separately, and from that identified (from each) a 'day in the life' for thick description. These accounts were written up as a means of keeping anchored in each case, and to help the eventual reader to 'get into the room' and see something of my cases in their respective work settings.

Next, all the data were read again (including the pieces of thick description, which were now part of the data set) to get a sense of the whole, and I began looking for cross-case commonalities, surprises, inconsistencies, recurrent elements, phrases and key words that were responsive in some way to the research questions. These segments were indicated by margin notes and Post-Its (a form of 'open-coding' – so, for example, 'moving things along' , 'collaborative', 'consensus', 'playing to others' strengths', 'leading from the back' – see sample page in Appendix 5). I also doodled, experimented with metaphors and went on long walks.

Formally, [data analysis] starts to take shape in analytic notes and memoranda; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer's ideas, hunches and emergent concepts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 174).



These margin notes and Post-Its were then compared, grouped and summarised in the form of a *pattern of doings*.

- **Analysis** (intertwined with interpretation)

Here I moved towards more robust identification of *thematic strands*. As Eisenhardt (1989, p. 540) notes “dimensions [thematic strands] can be suggested by the research problem, or by existing literature or the researcher can simply choose some dimensions”. Here I endeavoured to use all three.

In practice, this meant – in emergent fashion – comparing the data (and the pattern of doings) with four different and differently resonant strands from the literature. Metaphorically, this involved wrapping the data round each strand and giving it a vigorous shake to see what stuck, what dropped off, what was left and why; an exercise that unlocked further perspectives on both the data *and* the strands of literature. This is similar to what Seale (1999) calls approaching “the data with several hypotheses in mind, to see how each fares in relation to the data” (p. 54, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 215) i.e. it allowed for the possibility of different interpretations of the same data.

In this way, I compared, analysed and gave further structure to the data through multiple perspectives (Denzin’s, 1978 “theoretical triangulation”) and endeavoured to keep myself (as reflexive researcher), the cases, and the literature sources in the analytical weave as it evolved.

- **Interpretation** (intertwined with analysis)

Here I furthered the analysis by looking *across* the thematic strands, keeping the literature and the data alongside. This meant selecting and clustering analytic elements from each strand in order to formulate categories of ‘doings’, which were then further reduced, refined and theorised. This was a warp and weft exercise that enabled me to formulate (as set out in the Discussion chapter) a conceptual insight in the form of nine *propositions* about what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations, how and why.

In these ways, I was able to analyse and interpret the data and answer the research questions. Moreover, in the process, I was further able to reflect on the four strands of literature through the prism of the data. Thus, it was possible to draw novel inferences about cultural management *and* formulate a contribution to other theoretical conversations.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness, rigour and ethics**

A qualitative enquiry is of dubious worth if the researcher does not attend to issues of trustworthiness, rigour and ethics. In addition to the triangulation of multiple sources of data, methods and theoretical perspectives outlined above – which was intended to ensure rigour in carrying out the study – I also took a number of steps to conduct my enquiry in an ethical manner and to ensure that both methods and findings were plausible, authentic and ‘made sense’.

I sought feedback on the emerging findings from my cases (after the analysis and discussion chapters had been drafted) to see if they could recognise their experience in what was being said, and to find out if the nine propositions rang ‘true’. Their responses were enormously helpful in providing a welcome endorsement, informing fine tuning and providing an alert to the reductive dangers of presenting findings in the form of propositions. I also relied on feedback from both my supervisors to check out the credibility of my findings from different disciplinary standpoints: theatre studies (humanities) and organisation studies (social sciences).

I endeavoured to remain reflexive throughout the study and to be conscious of the assumptions, dispositions and beliefs I brought with me. It was therefore important to be upfront about this and very clear about the connection between my own history and how the findings were arrived at.

It was also essential to behave in an ethical manner at all stages in the research process. This necessitated an honest, reliable and considerate approach to the cases; guarantees of confidentiality and protection from harm being held to; and conduct during observation and interviews being sensitive and non-judgemental.

I obtained ethical approval for my fieldwork and consent forms were completed by all three cases.

Even though the cases and their organisations were referred to using initials, they all recognised that anonymity was impossible, the South West theatre world being quite small. They all agreed to initialised attribution of interview data, although one account was presented in ‘fictional’ form to respect sensitivities.

It was necessary to be vigilant in showing the trajectory from the early stages of the research to the findings and conclusions at the end, to give reassurance to the cases and any other readers, that the route taken had been the most appropriate, and that there had been a good balance between careful steps and any “uncodifiable creative leaps” (Weick, 1989).

It was also important to exercise caution in respect of any notion of “generalisability” of the findings, a concept which has long dogged qualitative researchers as philosophically inappropriate (Merriam, 2009, pp. 223-224). While it would be useful to see what this multiple ethnographic case study might suggest about a still larger group or class of cases, such suggestions can only ever be at the level of “modest extrapolations” (Patton, 2002, p. 584) about “processes managers get involved in” (Watson, 2001, p. 7) in a conceptual rather than an empirical sense (Yin, 1981), more often than not conveyed through thick description and largely left to reader interpretation.

To sum up, then, through a social constructionist paradigm, this enquiry adopted a qualitative, ethnographic multiple case study approach, involving three cultural managers in micro-scale theatre organisations in South West England. Data were collected through a triangulated combination of non-participant observation, informal interviews and documentary sources. These were analysed and interpreted through induction and deduction (implicitly straying into abductive territory). This enabled me, iteratively, to explore themes and concepts against a sensemaking backdrop, before arriving at (what I hope are) “accurate, parsimonious, general and useful” (Weick, 1979) theoretical insights and conclusions.

### **3.10 Introducing the cases**

Before moving into the analysis chapter, it is important to include a description of the cases themselves. This is necessary for two reasons. First, the analysis is context dependent so getting the reader acquainted with the three participating managers and their working milieux is essential. Second, it is a mark of respect to those women who provided the data for this research project, which is why the opportunity for acquaintance occurs here, rather than in an appendix. What follows is a thumbnail sketch of each case, according to their professional biography, current post, organisational history, context and purpose and particular work priorities, **as at December 2011**.

## **KK@THB**

### ***Professional biography***

KK is Executive Producer (0.8 FTE) of THB (a post she has held since 2010). She is also – concurrently – a freelance producer. Now approaching 40, KK has spent 14 years in arts management and theatre producing. She was previously General Manager at Volcano Theatre Company in Swansea where she produced six national and international touring shows, one large site-specific show co-produced by five middle scale venues, and an international collaboration with Uppsala State Theatre in Sweden and CTC in Macedonia. She also worked as Special Projects Officer in the Performing Arts Department of the British Council where she managed the British Council Showcase at the Edinburgh Festival and organised tours by leading UK companies to South East Asia and the Middle East. Either side of obtaining a degree in History and Religion from the West London Institute College of Brunel University in 1994, KK taught English in Japan and China before moving into arts management through voluntary and paid work in small scale arts organisations in Bristol. She is on the board of the Independent Theatre Council.

### ***Current Post***

According to her job description, the purpose of KK's post is two-fold: 'to creatively direct... THB in effectively developing theatre in and for Bristol, and to support artists and companies engaged in theatre-making to develop their capability in whatever areas are appropriate in their stage of development'. KK is responsible for coordination and leadership of the staff team of four, strategy development, industry analysis and involvement, fundraising, ensuring equality of opportunity for making and experiencing theatre in Bristol, and supervision of the THB website. The support for artists and companies that KK delivers and oversees may include (but is not limited to) touring and promotional advice, guidance in developing an appropriate scale of operation, help with fundraising applications, building relationships with funders and other stakeholders, formulating financial and business models, artist development, organisation of scratch nights and other creative forums, developing relationships with venues, festivals and other supportive bodies. She reports to the THB Board which comprises four members.

## ***Organisation***

THB is not a producing house, but it is a producer-led organisation. Founded in 2004, THB's mission is 'to make Bristol the nexus for theatre makers and audiences for new work'. It describes itself as 'an independent organisation which commissions and co-produces new work across the spectrum of performance (from circus to sound walks), offers bespoke artist support and training, runs a dynamic user-generated website, undertakes strategic research, and develops national and international exchange opportunities.' During the period of this research, THB was temporarily relocated to the attic floor of a nearby office building while Bristol Old Vic theatre (where they were previously based) underwent renovation. Here all five staff shared a communal office, storage and meeting space.

THB is a company limited by guarantee without charitable status. It has an annual turnover of £170,000 (2010) and – until becoming an NPO – was in receipt of Grants for the Arts funding from Arts Council England. THB is one of eight similar theatre development agencies across the South West region and together they comprise the Theatre South West network.

## ***Main priorities/focus of work during observation period***

A main focus for KK during this time was the funding, planning and resourcing of a three month period of organisational development (January – March 2012) to enable the team to 'get under the skin of what THB is, should be and could be'; consult on and update the 2008 Theatre Live Discussion Paper; 'write a bunch of policies and update our business plan' and be 'NPO-ready' by the end of it.

## **SS@BTH**

### ***Professional biography***

SS is Company Director of BTH in Plymouth, a post she has held since 2008. Now in her mid-fifties, her theatre career spans thirty years – most of which has been located at BTH. She was part of the founding artistic team in 1980 and worked for the company as a writer, performer, director and development worker in Theatre-in-Education and community arts projects until 2003. She then assumed the dual role of Development Director and Creative Practitioner from 2005-2008, before moving full-time into her current position as chief

executive officer with overall responsibility for BTH. She trained as an actor-teacher and later graduated with a degree in English from the Open University.

### ***Current post***

According to her job description, SS's current role is to lead the strategic planning, operation and delivery of BTH's activities. She line manages a staff team of eight (including the Artistic Director) and (during the period of enquiry) an equal number of temporary trainees/apprentices. She is responsible for policy development, external relations/reporting, finance and fundraising, marketing and communications, staff development, good practice in employment, health and safety, charity law compliance, child protection and contractual matters. She reports to a Council of Management and its Finance and General Purposes Committee.

### ***Organisation***

BTH is located in a converted chapel and mission hall in the historic Barbican area of Plymouth. Its facilities include a 140 seat auditorium with small backstage area and dressing rooms, a rehearsal studio, an independently run noodle bar/cabaret space, a box office and first and second floor administrative offices. SS shares an office with BTH's finance manager.

BTH is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It has an annual turnover of £300,000 (2010) and is core-funded by Arts Council England and Plymouth City Council.

BTH was originally set up as a professional outreach Theatre-in-Education organisation, touring new work to schools in Plymouth, Cornwall and Devon. In 1986 the city council bought the building as a home for the company who then paid a peppercorn rent. In 1998, the theatre was refurbished with a capital lottery grant bringing the whole building back into public ownership.

For the past ten years the role of BTH has evolved to respond to the needs of young people and emerging and professional artists in the city and the South West region. As a small scale venue it has been a first house for companies such as Adventures in Motion Pictures (now Matthew Bourne's New Adventures), Frantic Assembly and Peeplelykus. It has also been the focus of community theatre, youth theatre and youth dance activity (as a way of bringing forward new talent and potential) and a vital lifeline for local and regional artists

as a creative space for making and performing new work. At the same time, BTH continues its tradition of socially engaged practice by specialising in making new work in response to needs identified by Plymouth's diverse communities and the statutory and voluntary sector.

BTH's mission is 'to be regional leaders in the training and development of young, new and emerging theatre artists, dance artists and producers'. It aims to do this 'through the practice of making and presenting innovative, socially relevant theatre and dance of the highest quality, accessible to the most diverse audiences'.

### ***Main priorities/focus of work during observation period***

A main focus for SS during this period was the future of a number of BTH's activity strands in straightened economic circumstances; budgeting and fundraising for 2010/11 and 2011/12; and a prospective capital bid.

### **AU@MTH**

#### ***Professional biography***

AU is General Manager of MTH, a post she has held between 2002 and 2004 and again from 2008 to date. Now in her mid-thirties, AU has a background in film and TV production (both in her native Cornwall and in Australia). She also worked in marketing, festival coordination, administration and finance for film festival and fine art initiatives in Australia. She travelled extensively after completing her Degree in Media Production at Bournemouth University.

#### ***Current post***

According to her job description, AU is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation, strategic development and business planning, fundraising and financial management, tour booking/planning and event management. She works alongside the (p/t) Artistic Director and line manages two (p/t) staff, although for each production (up to three per year) this core team grows to between 12 and 15, including a stage manager, creative associates and actors, all of whom are employed on a freelance basis. AU reports to the MTH Board which is made up of seven trustees.

## ***Organisation***

Founded by the current Artistic Director, MTH began touring outdoor theatre shows in Cornwall in 1979. In the intervening years, MTH has undertaken 51 tours, including 23 new plays and 21 original adaptations. Now firmly established as one of the South West's leading small scale touring companies, MTH produces up to three shows a year and visits over 100 venues across Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and the rest of the South West, many in partnership with rural touring schemes. MTH's mission is 'to be a leading regional touring theatre company, firmly rooted in Cornwall, committed to delivering a rich variety of work that is intimate, touching, funny and relevant and fully adaptable for a wide range of venues – from rural touring to mid-scale theatres.' MTH prides itself on providing a springboard for new talent, commissioning freelance artists, employing local graduates, providing advice, sharing resources, equipment and rehearsal premises and offering training via placements, internships and workshops. The company also has a continuing interest in developing innovative production techniques (e.g. video animation and back projection) and new ways of staging open air performances. MTH operates from premises at Krowji, Cornwall's biggest 'creative cluster' which provides studios, workspaces, offices, the Melting Pot Cafe, meeting rooms and other facilities for a wide range of creative businesses, at the Old Grammar School Buildings in Redruth. During this research AU shared a quarter section of a large first floor multi-tenant office space with the company's marketing coordinator and finance manager. In December 2011, MTH moved into its new production base on-site, comprising offices, a kitchen, workshop and store and a fully equipped rehearsal studio.

MTH is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It has an annual turnover of £250,000 (2010) and is core-funded by Arts Council England and Cornwall Council.

## ***Main priorities/focus of work during observation period***

A main focus for AU during this time was a forthcoming touring production of Tin (a collaboration between MTH and English Touring Opera 'including Ben Luxon and local community choirs...a heady mix of epic theatre, multi-media magic and top notch singing', set in a Cornish tin-mining community in 1890. In



addition, she was overseeing the renovation of the company's new production centre.

Having introduced each case, attention now turns to data description and analysis.

# Chapter 4: Analysis

## Introduction

This chapter begins – relying heavily on fieldwork notes – with a description of my cases' work setting(s), followed by a sample of the activities and events observed – in the form of a 'Day in the Life' of each case. This first section ends with the summary 'results' of a preliminary sifting of the entire data set (thick description, observation notes, interview and other transcriptions, and the collection of documents) in the form of a 'pattern of doings'.

Moving further into data analysis, the remaining sections query, shape and extend this initial pattern of doings by assessing their resonance with four thematic strands drawn from the literature – whilst remaining close to the data. In this way, inductive and deductive ways of working are woven together, providing opportunities for further and ongoing abductive speculation. The chapter ends with a convergent summary and a lead-in to the discussion chapter, in which a conceptual insight (in the form of nine propositions about 'what cultural managers do') is set out.

### 4.1 Thick description

The working day for KK, SS and AU begins in their respective offices with coffee/tea/hot water, chatting with colleagues, and opening the computer. KK and AU are dressed in jeans or leggings and layered tops; SS in a short black dress with white collar and thick black tights. The ever-present hardback A4 notebook is out on the desk– containing 'to do' lists, Post-Its and notes of meetings. The office environment is functional, informal – mismatched furniture, shelves of files, piles of stuff; floors and surfaces the repository for recycling boxes, posters, brochures, newspapers and rolls of flipchart paper. There is a sense of things being put down for later and then getting forgotten. The offices have idiosyncratic touches: red-ink pens in the form of hypodermic syringes (left as a gift by someone on placement), a white board used to denote the organisation's 'brain' with thoughts added as they occur, box files labelled 'How to change the world in 7 days' and 'Dosh 2011', a ukulele leaning against a draughty window, a fluffy dinosaur slung over a radiator. The walls feature personal memorabilia, in-jokes and hand-written notices: 'THB is a massive tool', 'Please beware of the ... dog! Make yourself known before entering the

space...' and 'Don't feed the monkey'. Cardigans and coats are slung over chair backs. Desk tops are littered with a random selection of fruit, snacks and half empty mugs; the evidence of speedy eating and drinking. Wall calendars signify good January intentions and – aside from holiday weeks - remain for the most part, blank. Two of the offices are open plan and one of those is shared with staff from other arts organisations. The third accommodates the manager and the organisation's finance officer and it is smaller and more ordered than the other two ('If you want people to treat you in a business-like manner...' SS). All three offices are located at the top of their respective buildings (part of an old grammar school turned creative enterprise hub; a former chapel and seamen's mission; a Tudor building converted into offices, now occupied by a variety of business tenants). All are rather out-of-the way: they hum with a sense of purposeful activity, of busyness away from public view. The shop-front work happens elsewhere.

These cultural managers tend to start their days around 10.00 am (unless a deadline is looming) as they often stay on into the evening to finish work or to watch or support performance related work. The chatting to colleagues, with which they begin, is more significant than the term suggests. It kicks off their principal 'doing', which is talking, or rather talking with a lot of questioning and listening attached, most of which takes place in meetings.

It often feels like I never sit down at my desk, that I'm always in meetings...there's never a full day with no meetings, very rarely (KK).

I do do lots of meetings. Like the whole Plymouth Mela thing, how I tend to work up collaborations and partnerships which then become projects which then get passed along the line (SS).

I think a lot of days are either like today, in that I don't have to go and have meetings, I've just got to get hold of stuff which will be interrupted with other stuff that comes up. Or there are days that are more based around meetings and managing other people (AU).

Meetings-rich daily doings are also reflected in their 'to do' lists, which they set out in their A4 notebooks – using a combination of topic headings and action-orientated words: check, follow up, get back to, sort, update, decide, pay, plan, request, maximise, report on, search (see Figures 1-3).

My to-do list tends to have a heading, like organisation and development, and then I try to put realistic tasks underneath it, otherwise I just go Oh! How am I supposed to do that?' (KK).

These books also contain reminders to arrange meetings; activities to progress the artistic/development/touring work discussed in meetings and lots of tasks connected with money: raising it/ budgeting/ accounting for spend. The books are carried around during the day and are frequently used in meetings for notes and reference purposes.

The documents collected were either prepared for, or resulted from, meetings e.g. board agendas (formal and informal), papers, minutes; production/project and business plans; budgets, activity and financial reports. I was also copied in to applications for or communication about funding. Most of these documents had been written or pulled together by my cases and they were responsible for the content.

Email was used in an encouraging, frequently cryptic, witty and perfunctory way to pass on information, pose or respond to questions, ask for or give feedback on an idea/scheme/proposed action, or make arrangements to meet or talk on the phone. The tone was invariably upbeat and largely informal, with a liberal sprinkling of question and exclamation marks.

**Subject: Puppet Place Board Meeting tomorrow**

Hi Tob

Please accept my apologies for this evenings meeting. As someone on the edge as it were – I think I'll aim for four meetings a year. In between meetings – obviously keen to help in any way THB can.

Hope the biscuits are good without Ms McNally!

KK x

**Subject: Coastal Communities Local Enterprise Partnership Fund – may be of interest as a consortium bid for our next big project!!!**

Hi June

Another brilliant idea. I would really like to talk to you about next year now that I know the result of your G4A. I am going away for a six week break from 30 March [this was to be the longest break SS had taken in 20 years

with the organisation] so need to speak to you before I go. When can you???

SS

**Subject: TIN**

Hi Angela

Thanks for checking in! We have done lots of work this week on figuring out the schedule for working the choirs into the show, with the full cast, etc.

I will send you a copy of this for review (later today hopefully) and approval before I pass onto the schools. I will also use it as a basis for getting final commitments from the adults, so they are a bit clearer of what they are actually agreeing to!

I had a chat with Tim the other day and it sounds like we should try and streamline the adults as much as possible – so that you have a minimum amount of different groups to work with (I guess , ideally, we would just work with one big group as we discussed). This might mean one group (i.e. Holman Climax might work with both Redruth and Pool kids and do 8 performances instead of 4). Do you think this would work? It would just mean our sessions working with them into the actual show would be a little more straightforward!

I'll be in touch soon and will get back to the other woman you sent over.

Cheers AU

It is important to note that my cases all suggested I observe them on days when 'there were things happening', which they contrasted with 'sitting at the computer' in the office, or working on funding applications, plans and reports in the evenings or at home. They saw meetings as a visible and substantive activity which I might find useful for shadowing purposes. Two of my cases also remarked that if I observed them in meetings, then I would be occupied in a way that did not put pressure on them to 'look after' me.

So, what shape did these days of meetings take?

## 4.2 A day in the life of...

### KK @ THB

*Tuesday, just after 10.00am*

In the meeting area at the end of the open plan attic space that makes up THB's office, KK opens her A4 spiral-bound notebook and convenes the monthly company meeting around a low Formica-covered coffee table: four out of six colleagues – all THB producers – are seated (KK, TA, KD and MM), having dragged over an assortment of chairs. The Dance Producer (p/t) (E-JB) and Administrator (SKi) are not present ('She's been working really hard and it's great she's taking a holiday' KK). KK shares the impromptu agenda she has just written in her notebook. KD offers to take notes on her laptop.

Meetings always begin with a three-minute update from everyone, which is 'never three minutes'. It's an opportunity to share feedback on shows seen; planned and chance meetings with artists and performance companies; support given to practitioners (feedback on funding applications, marketing advice, a producer's perspective), priority tasks over the next month... There is evident frustration with artistic work that is not as good as they feel it could be...delight and excitement at stuff that is. The emphasis is on how to help make theatre work the best it can be, in and for Bristol. The updates proceed through robust and pithy exchanges...listening to and questioning each other: 'I want THB to come out well from this' KK; 'Yeah, but what does that mean?' TA) Cryptic, short-hand remarks and aphorisms pepper each contribution:

...saw the Royal Ballet on a lake while eating oysters...revolting combo...

...they are excessive jugglers, which is a shame...

...he reckons an administrator begins with 'how much will it cost?' whereas with a producer it's 'how can we make it work well?'

The conversation moves seamlessly between the ironic and the serious; the practical ('What do we want in the newsletter, please?' KK) and the abstract ('What is 'engagement' in this day and age?' KK); the past, present and future. Ways of progressing tasks are negotiated informally ('I'll do it if I can blag a bit of your help' (TA); 'I'll do the inviting to interview, then' KK). KK spends most of her time listening, holding the space, recognising achievements ('Nice work!'),

quietly working through the agenda, watching the time and checking in with the group:

That was more of a catch-up than a planning meeting, but does everyone feel OK with that? Shall I put the kettle on?

This should not be confused, however, with being a push-over:

(To KD) Those notes – don't do any editing. Make us correct our own bits (KK).

*Fast forward to a subsequent Monday (10.05) and a pre-meet between KK, E-JB (TBH Dance Producer) and an external dance colleague (LS) in preparation for an imminent meeting with an Arts Council officer (AS) to explore continued/future funding possibilities for E-J's post.*

Right, we have got a little bit of time. Twenty five minutes before AS gets here so it is a little bit of a war meeting! I think we agreed before that she quite likes interactive-type meetings and that, you know, it's not a sales pitch anyway because she is so on our side (KK).

E-J rolls out a length of wallpaper on the reverse side of which there is an assortment of Post-Its in columns delineating her work plan: long-term outcomes, short-term outcomes, outputs, inputs (a template suggested by another colleague in the region). KK suggests that E-J explains it first to LS as a dry run (to practise) before AS arrives ('Don't worry; take your time' KK). The focus and format of the meeting with AS emerges gradually:

I think we should say that we want to pick her [AS's] brains, we want to talk about the post, we want to think about where it fits...and perhaps if you (E-J) lead the meeting a little bit more and then L and I can sit back and think and ask questions, if that's alright with you? (KK).

The conversation moves through questions, the reasons why E-J's post is important (it is difficult to facilitate important new projects with only p/t capacity), discussion of where dance in Bristol fits in to the regional picture, and the occasional wry bit of self-observation ('I'm often quite anxious about over-promising and under-delivering' KK). There are frequent segues into other topics (e.g. the benefits and drawbacks of job-share arrangements, men tending to 'big up' what they do more readily than women, the ethics of naked circus

performance in a former church, and ‘I don’t think I can wait any longer before having a biscuit’ KK). It all seems very loose and casual. A lot is covered in a short space of time.

AS arrives, and after introductions, E-J begins the meeting by talking through her plan. KK – along with LS – supports, prompts and adds additional information when asked. She also takes the opportunity to endorse E-J’s achievements to date:

A meeting E-J had last week with the promoters was just brilliant (KK).

Again, the conversation moves between the tactical and the strategic, the regional and the local, the personal and the professional, reaching the point where KK asks:

What shall we do? What shall we do next, because I’m concerned that E-J’s job is going to stop in July? So... ?

AS works hard to see ways in which TB might find additional ‘project management’ funds to employ E-J for some extra days (she is currently on a 0.5 contract), without compromising the fact that NPOs are precluded from applying to the Arts Council for additional help with core costs. A number of possibilities are scoped out.

Despite the fact that the meeting is inconclusive, AS has been supportive and KK remains upbeat:

It’s absolutely amazing for me, though, because I’ve had ‘find money for E-J’s post’ on my to-do list...for ages and EJ came to me and said ‘What about this?’ [working on a plan and evaluating work to date], and I’d spoken to LS already, so now I’ve got *three* people to talk to... So, food: it’s lunchtime! (KK).

*On to the afternoon (14.00):* and the sofa area of a theatre foyer, where KK has three one-hour artist ‘support’ sessions booked in.

KK welcomes the first person (‘My job is to help people to self-produce their work’) and then invites him to begin: ‘Over to you...this is your meeting!’ This is a writer who wants advice on how to progress a piece he has written (about the Large Hadron Collider – combining vaudeville, burlesque, religion and particle physics) beyond its rehearsed reading. KK answers his queries with warm



authority, using a combination of questions and encouraging suggestions to move things along:

How many in the cast?

We (THB) can offer expertise... I'd love to get my hands on your G4A [bid]...and I'm just wondering if it might be better coming from a director or producer [rather than a writer]?

Having a production [rather than a script] is a great calling card...

You could start to collate a tour pack [which] makes you think about what's required..?

For four people on the road, for one night, I'd be looking at £1200.00, reducing to £1000.00, and then maybe accept £800.00...start with what can we earn from this show, and then focus on costs and horrendous public subsidy figure...I can definitely help you with what you put where in the budget.

For bookings in the autumn, it needs to be done and dusted by Easter.

Bigging up the science is a good idea, because it suggests you can target an audience.

If all else fails...do a 'profit'-share and go ahead anyway?

KK finishes by asking the writer to send her a one-page proposal to look over and offers to link him up with a local producer who might be interested in getting involved.

The second surgery is a no-show... ('It happens, but not very often' KK).

The third session involves someone who wants to 'turn a radio play into a product with some shelf-life', beginning with a live recording. He doesn't want to take the funding route and would prefer to seek support-in-kind. Again, KK listens more than she talks and tries to make connections between the person's aspirations and possible ways forward ('So, you need space, and people...expertise?') She observes that 'one way of getting a project off the ground is to become part of the local theatre scene' and offers him a free ticket for forthcoming work-in-progress evening at a Bristol-based theatre. She explains the intricacies of getting a gig at a venue...fees, hires, box-office splits...'I'm just thinking about how these people [venue managers] work and

where you fit?’ She is also clear about the length of time it can take to bring a project to fruition (two years in the case of a production she has recent knowledge of). Finally she suggests starting with a promotional trailer ‘Fifty people could get you the audience sound you need?’

*17.40:* The day finishes with an early evening visit to a 400 seat pub venue (live music; pole dancing...) where the manager wants to start programming live theatre Mondays to Thursdays. The floor is sticky, the lighting low (no windows) and there is an all pervasive smell of stale beer. KK is friendly (she was invited to visit) and careful in her questioning about the venue’s website, the manager’s ideas about prospective bookings, where the venue might ‘sit’ in the Bristol live performance landscape...she is already thinking of work that might be suitable and where there might be mutual benefits for venue and artists.

KK then heads off to see an evening performance elsewhere in the city...

## **SS @ BTH**

*Tuesday...*and it’s wall-to-wall meetings...beginning with an informal discussion with AT (Finance and Resources Manager) with whom SS shares a small top floor office, about child poverty rates in Plymouth and how BTH relates to or engages with that. SS shows me the adjacent kitchen and warns of the difficulty of ever finding a clean mug.

*10.00:* and it’s downstairs into the rehearsal studio (table and chairs swiftly pulled into the centre of the room) for the weekly operations meeting chaired by SS, which today is attended by ML (Artistic Director), EW (Creative Producer), KL (Operations Manager), BL (Cafe/bar Manager), AT, and JS (Production Manager). People arrive, then remember they’ve forgotten something (a pen, mug of tea...), so it takes a while to start. SS reminds everyone that audience and participation data must be submitted on a weekly basis...JS is confused about who he is answerable to for a forthcoming gig in the cafe/bar which is franchised out to an external organisation and SS confirms that in terms of working hours, fire regulations etc., he is responsible to BTH...discussion of duty rota for front-of-house...request for training in Google mail etc. for older members of staff ‘You don’t need it ‘cos you’re young!’ (SS to EW). SS is conscious of the remaining agenda items (‘I think we’re losing time, now’). EW reports on recent meeting to discuss proposed National Theatre for Devon... ML

feeds back on political difficulties over an Interreg (EU) bid... there is dismay over BTH's lack of involvement in the forthcoming British Art Show in Plymouth... then 'No-one's got any holidays coming up?' (SS). Discussion moves on to a logistical problem: an interval audience (from the theatre) will need to access the cafe/ bar at the same time as eaters and drinkers will be using it for a gig night: 'We could have 100 people coming down at 9.00 to a full bar'... 'If people are [still] eating at 9.00, we're buggered' (SS). Everyone becomes actively engaged in solving the problem...SS is particularly concerned about the public's comfort and the quality of the overall experience of visiting BTH. The meeting shifts topic and register at speed, the discussion is very task and solution orientated, and there is the sense that everyone is very busy and needs to get on. 'Anything else...?' (SS). The meeting finishes at 10.25.

Back in the office, SS has a phone conversation about how BTH can contribute to a cross-sectoral approach to reducing alcohol misuse in the city...'I can get support for workshops...so how much will that cost? Can I just talk to ML [Artistic Director] and craft it out with him?' (SS)...the focus is very much on making stuff happen in partnership with others.

11.10: SS moves over to the marketing office...she and CC (Marketing Manager) need to push a show that is on in two weeks' time (about a couple whose son is about to leave for his second tour of duty in Afghanistan). SS has agreed to draft copy for a personalised email to go out to those who have useful networks. EW comes in briefly to offer a description of the piece, which she has seen. SS and CC sit very closely together in front of the computer screen as SS types...SS refers to her A4 notebook in which she has written information she can draw on for the key paragraph...her approach is that of coach 'Maybe we could...?' (SS), and she is clear that CC is the marketing expert, not her...'This is turning into bollocks... That's pants as well' (SS)...lots of laughing. They are interrupted by ML who wants SS to come to a 14.00 meeting to sort out the issue with the production manager and the gig he's working on for the bar franchise...SS agrees. CC has to take a call about some artwork she is expecting. SS then asks CC to phone another colleague to get the name of someone she met who has an Armed Forces contact. The conversation moves in and out of the task in hand. SS decides that the letter should be sent out from

the Artistic Director, so capturing his voice is important. Finally, after a number of drafts, SS concludes 'That would get me to come!' and the task is completed.

11.55: a meeting in the same room between SS, CC (Marketing Manager) and KL (Operations Manager) to discuss Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) required by the Arts Council as a condition of NPO funding. KPIs are quantitative and qualitative and will require the efficient collection, monitoring and analysis of audience and user-statistics and other data. KL is immediately called downstairs again to deal with a ticket purchase (she works in the box office); CC's phone rings and she deals with the call while KL is out of the room. There is noise from the adjacent kitchen and toilet: SS shuts the door. SS hands out an A4 summary of the draft KPIs ('which might change'). All of this is part of BTH becoming 'NPO-ready' by April 2012. SS: 'I'm really bad at this type of stuff...' which helps get the others engaged. Her focus throughout is on how best to support staff to do their job and how to make best use of their skills. The conversation ends - typically - with agreement on who is going to do what next and when. There is the strong view that 'statistics' needs to be a standing item at operations meetings because 'no-one submits their figures off their own bat' (SS). ML comes in: one of the graduate trainees will be late in as he has left his wallet at home. Interruptions seem constant...SS exhibits equanimity throughout (unless she's talking to someone in her office, in which case she ignores the knocking as a signal that she's not available).

12.25: a marketing meeting with CC to prepare for an agenda item at the afternoon's company meeting. A new marketing system is underway and there is residual confusion – voiced by the Artistic Director and Dance Director – about who now does what, and how to check back that things have been done. SS and CC agree that communication needs to be clear and on the level: gossip can be damaging in a tiny organisation like this. CC checks with SS about what to communicate in the meeting: 'Just give them an A4 summary and talk to it' (SS). Key issues seem to be distribution of print at the university (and collecting it when it is out of date), limited capacity to do everything, who puts what on Facebook, the appearance of the foyer on Fridays (pre-performance) and the need for an 'early warning' if things are not going to be achieved (i.e. back to the capacity issue). SS is clear that she is supportive of and trusting of CC in a difficult situation 'How can I protect you?' (SS). The structure of the

afternoon agenda item is agreed, and SS – as well as chairing the meeting – will provide back-up as necessary.

*Over lunch...*SS checks EW's involvement in the Christmas show (a co-production with another micro-scale company)...starts editing the Council of Management minutes which need to go out before the next Arts Council grant instalment can be released...fields a query from the production manager about an additional £100-£200 to cover the unexpectedly complex technical requirements of a visiting company. The phone rings (calls come direct to SS and are taken in a friendly and informal manner...'Hello, S speaking!'). It is a poet (Monkey Poetry) who is touring twin pieces in the spring – Welcome to Afghanistan and Welcome to the UK – and is looking for another booking after two nights in Falmouth. SS sees the connection with the South West Poetry Slam (which BTH will be hosting at that time), so probes further: 'And this is the awful question...how much are you?' He answers. SS responds: 'That's too much for us I'm afraid...but very interesting material...right up our street...Listen; you could come here on the 30<sup>th</sup>? Don't do anything until I get back to you!' She leaves it that she will speak to the Artistic Director and see what can be done.

To me: 'That's what keeps me in this job...boring Council of Management minutes and then conversations like this...making connections with the Youth Slam...Apples and Snakes might subsidise?'

*14.05:* in the cafe/bar...SS meets with JS (production manager) and the owner of the company leasing the cafe/bar, to clarify the nature of JS's involvement in the forthcoming gig event. SS is assertive and robustly charming: she gives no quarter and JS will remain answerable to BTH throughout the event. She also clarifies how much JS's one evening secondment will cost the cafe/bar. The discussion then moves on to the programme for the evening; the America's Cup (which the city hosted) 'Really professionally done...excellent' (SS); and reports of a trip to Istanbul. There is lots of humour...laughter. Then SS concludes the discussion: 'Right, well I think we've sorted that!'

Back in the office, SS returns to the Council of Management minutes...takes a phone call from someone at the City Council about the Plymouth leg of the Olympic torch relay in May 2012. SS volunteers to pass the message on to the Dance Director (JL). The owner of the company leasing the cafe/bar comes in to complain about not being allowed to put his own publicity material out:

'Please Miss...' SS gives him short shrift: 'That's a conversation for another time...not on the hop like this'.

15.10 in the rehearsal studio again, this time for the Tuesday company meeting. SS refers to her A4 notebook and writes the agenda up on a flipchart. People come and go...forgetting, then remembering things...making tea. There is tongue-in-cheek discussion about how colleagues living outside Plymouth are 'migrant workers'...and a recent article in *The Guardian* about Tavistock. SS hands over to CC for her presentation, making it clear that she (SS) takes responsibility for any teething troubles there have been with the new marketing system: 'Blame me, I set the priorities!' SS then opens things up for discussion, setting a calm and considerate tone. Throughout, she monitors each contribution and then brings the strands together. The issues raised in the pre-meet all come up.

There is a short break, during which SS talks to ML about the earlier Monkey Poetry conversation. She remarks – before re-starting – that it's the men they are waiting for *again*.

16.15: company feedback following BTH's promotion of two co-productions at the Edinburgh Fringe the previous August. EW leads (using prepared evaluation questions). The benefits are seen as raising the national profile of BTH, visiting lots of different venues and having the chance to see new work. SS feels that there should be serious thought about the motivation for going to Edinburgh and a better financial formula the next time. Issues were difficulty in assessing the effectiveness of flyers ('fear of flyering') and the occasionally ungracious behaviour of the artists: 'I'd just like to say that the staff team were so generous and supportive of them' (SS). Everyone agrees that during the run it was really good having someone at home doing the cooking... 'That's it, then' (SS).

17.05: a handful of staff stay behind to hear more about proposals for a National Theatre for Devon and an Open Space event about live performance in Somerset. Again, EW leads. SS is aware that time is marching on...'OK, headlines'. Throughout, SS listens and asks questions, alongside the others.

17.40 SS goes off to attend to a staffing issue...

## AU @ MTH

*Friday 13.30:* (AU has been working at home on a funding bid in the morning). AU (General Manager), EG (Communications Manager) and EY (Exeter University English graduate on work experience) are sitting in their corner of the open-plan office (also occupied by several other organisations). It's cold and draughty...the small wood burning stove in the middle of the space is struggling to cope. AU and EG are talking through budgetary matters – what is core expenditure and what is specifically earmarked for marketing? AU is self-conscious about the rice cakes and humus on her desk – the remains of a snatched lunch. JS (Chair of MTH and CEO of another organisation sharing the first-floor space) offers to make me a cup of tea. Someone is in the meeting room, just off the kitchen, practising the ukulele (one of an all-women group – including AU – that gets together on a weekly basis).

*13.40:* AU moves to the on-site cafe (complete with small cabaret stage, decoupage tables and chairs, miscellaneous art work on the walls and lampshades made out of cutlery hanging from the ceiling). AU hooks up with BS (MTH Artistic Director) and reminds him of a meeting early afternoon to talk about the image to be used for the Tin poster (forthcoming co-production with English Touring Opera about Cornwall's mining past):

How urgent is it? (BS)

Well, ideally two months ago so it could go in the Hall for Cornwall brochure? (AU)

The rest of the Tin production team (AM, JM, J and M) join them for a lunch meeting. All six crowd round one table and everyone (except AU) orders lunch. She introduces me as her 'stalker'. Discussion starts with issues around back-projection for the Tin movie – which will be filmed after the live tour. AU does lots of listening. There is energetic and appreciative talk about spending time 'playing' at the moment and being 'easily distracted'. There is a question about when pre-publicity interviews are going to be filmed (involving partners, former tin miners, cast members, particularly Ben Luxon) and AU stresses the need for website content. The conversation segues into someone's forthcoming holiday in Morocco: 'Can you *not* come back with a tan, please?' (AU).

There is agreement on when the interview week will happen:

You're going to organise that week, then, are you? (AU)

Yes... (BS)

You mean yes, with confidence? (AU)

Lunch arrives and there is a lull while they all start eating. Everyone begins to riff on stories about holidays...AU is going for a break to Amsterdam...AM (designer) recounts the time he ended up sleeping under a hedge in Amsterdam with only a Zippo lighter and a Swiss Army knife to his name...there is lots of piss-taking in response.

Someone expresses concern that BS has not had enough to eat. Two of the production team offer to share their food...and he finally accepts their leftovers. It's all very familial. There is talk about the arts work they have each seen recently and the Cornish Film Festival's recent move to Newquay.

To BS: 'Right, let's go and see Emma' (AU).

Lunch is over; everyone gets up and leaves.

14.20: in the first floor meeting room, which is even colder and more draughty than the office space. AU turns on the heater. AU, BS and EG discuss the image for the Tin poster (a photo-shoot having been organised for the following day). The CEO of the creative sector cluster of which MTH forms part knocks on the door for a quick word with AU, who leaves the room.

BS and EG continue the discussion. It transpires that there is an actor lined up to be the model for the poster...the issue, however, is that she may not eventually be cast in the role. The concern is less an issue of consistency and more a matter of principle:

The thing is, that would be very difficult to ask her to do the picture, to say, you know, you can't be in it but... (BS)

...but can we use your face? (EG)

Using existing shots of Ben Luxon (celebrated Cornish and world renowned opera singer, now in his seventies) is not a viable option either, because a) he's not in costume and b) while he'll be in the production, his appearance on the poster might suggest that he'll be singing – which he no longer does since losing much of his hearing.



...I totally think we just call it now... Talking...as a punter it won't make any difference but that's not the point. It will make a difference to *us* and the most important thing is that we've got an image that we feel comfortable with... (EG)

Well, I think that's the right call because we have always used people who are in the shows when we have used a face on a poster... (BS)

Is that alright? (BS)

Course it is (EG)

AU returns and is in agreement:

Yeah, I just think as much as we say it's just a paid modelling job, it's not very nice if she doesn't end up...and we are going to, you know, you don't want to feel obliged (AU)

EG leaves the meeting: 'OK, I'll sort it, don't worry'

AU checks in with BS, whom she knows is facing multiple deadlines on different aspects of the production.

Er, OK, are you alright B? (AU)

Just about... (BS)

It's all a bit too much! (AU)

It is a bit too much... (BS)

Sorry, I had like to drag you up here because I was, like, it's not feeling right, let's just deal with it now... (AU)

AU then suggests ways in which BS might reduce his current workload e.g. by delegating the organisation/scheduling of the pre-production interviews to the two assistant directors. BS wants to ensure that he makes the first move in contacting those who'll take part: '...it's like / need to go up to King Edward Mine and talk to them about filming there and interviewing some of the...' (BS).

AU senses this is not perhaps the time to push it:

Let's not decide now. Get through today and then we'll regroup, in terms of just looking at what we need to prioritise, what if anything we need to get rid of (AU)

Yeah, OK (BS).

Discussion then moves on to whether or not the new rehearsal space will be ready by the time the existing space is bulldozed...the viability of flipping the schedule and doing the film first...the complications of filming against green screen and scale models... and the fact that everyone's stretched: '...we're overloaded in each and every direction' (AU)... They agree that BS needs to get back to work, and AU needs to talk through that evening's board meeting agenda with JS (MTH Chair).

14.25: JS arrives. As well as being a meeting between the MTH chair and executive officer, this is also a conversation between two cultural managers (this is JS's role too).

It's very cold in here; do you want the stove on? Well, I'm cold anyway (JS)

I'm OK. You can tell you've been to Italy. You look very nice today. Is that a new dress? (AU)

No, these are my Italian tights. Are you here tomorrow? (JS)

No (AU)

You should see the ones I'm going to wear tomorrow – they are phenomenal. Who's coming tonight? (JS)

Discussion ranges over who has sent apologies; the room the meeting will be held in; MTH's move into the refurbished building; hiccups with the management accounts (the responsibility of a newly involved freelancer) and how to address the issue before Tin, and amongst all the other calls on AU's time; the possibility of adding a day for Miracle on to the new finance officer's contract at the organisation JS directs (so benefitting from economies of scale); and similar problems being experienced by another arts organisation.

They go through the management accounts together so that JS is up to speed for the meeting, and do a dry run on the other agenda items. JS checks to see if AU has been able to follow up all matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting, including staff appraisals: 'I'm having mine soon. I just had to bump mine because it was all too much' (AU); the renewal of EG's contract; prospective new board members; letting Companies House know about one

member's recent resignation; and who might be tasked with drawing up a business plan for the new rehearsal space (hirings etc.). Discussion then moves back to Italy, filming Tin, AU's break in Amsterdam...and BS: 'B has reached his limit today, so I don't know if he is going to speak at the board meeting...' (AU).

AU returns to the office to finish preparing...someone immediately calls wanting to borrow the company van: 'If you just put some diesel in it when you return it that would be great' (AU)... a board member arrives with a number of queries, followed by another, and another.

17.30: the board meeting begins...

19.10: AU goes home.

### **4.3 A pattern of doings**

How might I begin to identify a pattern across the above data and the data set as a whole? What are the categories or clusters that might help make sense of the events or processes described here? How can I know what I think until I see what I say?

Having sifted the whole data set with the question 'where are the rich bits; where do I stop and think/wonder about what is going on; where do similar things seem to recur both within and across the cases?', and reviewed and clustered the margin notes and Post-Its, I became increasingly aware of striking behavioural similarities between all three cases, with differences being a matter of degree or emphasis. Aside from their constant and very varied activity (usually in communication with others) all three seemed to do a lot of register-shifting and shuttling – seamlessly – from one topic or mode to another. This is depicted below in the form of intersecting or co-existing continua or "interdependent polarities" (Johnson, 1992, 1998), along or between which the cases seemed to move, in a future-orientated and continuous iteration.

In this way, I hope to convey the sense of both/and-ness (as opposed to either/or-ness) that permeated the data, together with the continuous intermingling of 'what' and 'how' (and indeed the 'why') that ran through their doings, as follows:

### **Individual/collective**

- taking quick, decisive solo action **and** engaging (through conversation) in slower, collaborative, iterative and ongoing working out of ways forward (which even then remain open to change).
- fixity of purpose/principle/values **and** ongoing not-knowing (often in response to a high level of uncertainty and frequent interruptions or delays on the part of others): 'I don't really know what I think about it yet. Maybe I'll work it out as I talk', 'S is always quite good at re-writing intentions in retrospect...maybe TBH has always done that,' 'I reckon we've reinterpreted after the event'.

### **Inside/outside**

- mediating the organisation to others **and** others to the organisation 'I represent the public when I'm here and the organisation to the public when I'm out'.
- operating invisibly for significant chunks of time (they feel that others in their organisation don't really know what they do and were rather bemused at being observed) **and** very visibly in meetings, in public, in writing, and when things go wrong.
- projecting confidence/calm/balance **and** experiencing uncertainty, isolation, irritation and stress ('I do get niceness fatigue').
- collecting/editing/making or re-making stories for different people/ purposes (e.g. funny instances, tales of incongruity, 'I'm going to put Bill on it for 24 hours and then I'll put it in the right shape', 'We need to be clear about what the story is here') **and** disseminating them (frequently mentioning/elaborating on something from meeting to (different) meeting).

### **Means/ends**

- passion and a critical sensibility for the artistic work of their own organisation **and** continuous preoccupation with (and work on) 'the money' to make work happen and keep things going (the source of most of their anxiety and a particularly time-consuming part of their job).
- 'holding' the big (strategic, future orientated) picture and the ethos/values of the organisation **and** focusing on pragmatic detail in order to get things done.

- being product **and** audience/participant/user-led, particularly in respect of socially engaged work.
- 'boring' routine (answering emails, drafting budgets/reports, writing applications for funding) **and** instances of real excitement, usually in relation to unexpected artistic opportunities, new links, ingenious ways of maximising limited resources, making something 'work'.
- dividing time between practising **and** presenting (often with others) ideas, arguments and ways forward on important and urgent issues.

### **Tight/loose**

- being accountable (taking the business seriously) **and** 'blagging' to funders (e.g. in deciding on 'appropriate' Key Performance Indicators for Arts Council England).
- organising efficiently with just enough management and structure to get the job done; reliance on the ubiquitous A4 hard backed notebooks; incessant diary checking (self and others) – **and** mucking about/playing/behaving informally (in a familial, approachable, friendly manner).
- direction-giving **and** non-directive coaching and facilitating (lots of 'sitting by Nellie').
- shifting conversational register - seamlessly - **all the time**: they can move from discussing a predicted deficit, to a production they've seen, to consideration of a current political issue, to someone's new haircut - in the same conversation, and this seems very much part of the working 'culture'.

In the sections that follow, parts of this pattern (and the pattern as a whole) are compared and contrasted with a range of (resonant) theoretical perspectives – whilst staying close to the data. This is undertaken in iterative and emergent fashion – as befits a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary sensemaking exercise.

The different perspectives are framed as four *thematic strands* which are then summarised and synthesised at the end of the chapter.

### **Thematic strand (1): What do managers do?**

Since the research question builds on one previously asked: 'What do managers do?' (Mintzberg, 1973), part of the analytical strategy involves looking for comparisons and differences with the categories or dimensions of that earlier research.

It is important to stress that this study was not intended directly to replicate Mintzberg's work, although that was a very influential springboard. There are important methodological differences e.g. I did not list my cases' actions on a minute-by-minute basis and I also interviewed them about what they do, because I wanted to capture their voices and perspectives and not rely solely on my own observations. There is also variation in terms of our respective research 'subjects'. The managers observed in Mintzberg's 1968 study operated in large scale business corporations with high levels of turnover. They were also all men. The managers in this study work in publicly subsidised micro-organisations with a turnover of less than £500,000 in each case. They are all located within the same domain of the cultural field (performing arts and specifically theatre). And they are all women. It is in respect of this last point that the work of Helgesen (1990, 1995, and Helgesen & Johnson, 2010) – who drew on Mintzberg (1973) in her studies of women managers and leaders – is brought into the analytical mix. Issues of context, scale and sector are addressed in more detail later.

Mintzberg identified six *characteristics* of 'what managers do'.

- much work at a relentless pace;
- activity characterized by brevity, variety and fragmentation;
- preference for live action;
- attraction to verbal media;
- maintenance of communication links between his (*sic*) organization and a network of contacts;
- blend of rights and duties.

He also divided the content of their work between these *ten roles* (in three categories):

#### *Interpersonal*

- Figurehead – performing symbolic duties as a representative of the organisation.
- Leader – establishing the atmosphere and motivating subordinates.
- Liaiser – developing and maintaining webs of contacts outside the organisation.

### *Information*

- Monitor – collecting all types of information that are relevant and useful to the organisation.
- Disseminator – transmitting information from outside the organisation to those inside.
- Spokesman [sic] – transmitting information from inside the organisation to outsiders.

### *Decision-making*

- Entrepreneur – initiating change and adapting to the environment.
- Disturbance-handler – dealing with unexpected events.
- Resource-allocator – deciding on the use of organisational resources.
- Negotiator – negotiating with individuals and dealing with other organisations.

There are a number of ways in which – evidenced by the thick descriptions and pattern of doings above – the ‘doings’ of these cases seem to overlap with Mintzberg’s findings. These cultural managers have jobs which are open-ended with fairly constant activity. They devote more than their contracted hours and often think about work in their free time:

I keep a pad by my bed. This is what I find, if at 3.00 o’clock in the morning I wake up and have a good idea or I have had a breakthrough, which I have gone to bed thinking, oh, and what do I do about this? Then literally, if I don’t write it down, it just keeps me awake (SS).

Their daily tasks are very varied, brief and fragmented. They become easily pre-occupied by all the things they *aren’t* doing.

Yeah, we’re all really, really busy...And you know...that particular application has been hanging over me for about a year, all the time that I should have been writing it and haven’t got it done yet, to getting it in on the very last possible date that I could get it in on...(AU).

Their work tends to be action-orientated: it is about making things happen and keeping the momentum going.

Making things happen is the most creative part of my job...(AU).

They have a preference for live encounters with others – either on a one-to-one basis or in groups, which is where negotiation and information exchange happen. Verbal and written contacts make up the bulk of the work. While informal exchanges and office-based tasks tend to be of short duration, scheduled (and some unscheduled) meetings are accorded a significant amount of time (I did not attend an internal or external meeting that was less than an hour's duration). Impromptu conversations are commonplace: sometimes they are work-related, sometimes not. The “trivial” and the “consequential” are frequently interspersed...”requir[ing] the manager [to] shift moods quickly and frequently...” (Mintzberg, 1973, p. 51). My managers are responsible for their organisation's commitments and have considerable influence over what projects get taken on, with an attendant impact on their own workload.

There are also some differences between the activities of Mintzberg's managers and those studied here. Mirroring Helgesen's (1990) findings (she observed four women executives in three corporations and one large-scale NGO), my cases moved through their day with a fast and steady pace, without things becoming noticeably “relentless”: in fact, they ‘presented’ as very calm at all times. Mail/emails/phone messages (while getting cursory treatment, as with Mintzberg's men) tended to be dealt with in chunks of time set aside for the purpose (at the start of the day, at lunchtime, or early evening).

They did take short refreshment breaks (often making a drink for colleagues at the same time). One manager made a regular point of having a proper lunch (collected from a local food market and brought back to the office) which was eaten – often with colleagues – away from her desk.

They felt it was very important to maintain open access, particularly for colleagues, so ‘interruptions’ were regarded as an intrinsic part of their work, rather than an impediment to getting on with it. As with Helgesen's women, my cases believed that this degree of openness was an important part of building and maintaining good working relationships; something that required a caring attitude, a willing ear and occasionally, a lending hand.

I guess I am quite supportive, quite nurturing, quite friendly. I do think that if people are feeling happy and confident they are better. I know I am (KK).



Keeping relationships in good repair – both within and outside the organisation – was seen as a vital part of their job and a key determinant of success.

I guess all MTH is, is the people who are here working together and the people that come and see our shows and what we are producing for them and as long as everybody's safe and looked after and it earns some money, then that's hopefully alright! (AU)

Despite busy day-to-day activity, they saw themselves as future-orientated planners who kept the long term in view.

...quite a lot of my stuff is about strategic thinking and about where we should go next' (SS).

I think I am quite future orientated, just as a person generally...I do reflect, I think, a bit, but probably mostly forward...In fact, I don't look after the now, I just hope the now looks after itself (KK).

I am quite involved in the planning and the decision making with BS in terms of why would we do this, why would we do that?' (AU).

They were always on the look-out for new trends, opportunities and sources of funding and income-generation for the organisation and the differences they were ultimately after - clearly expressed by two out of my three cases - were societal ones:

...I guess for me it is not necessarily the culture projects, it's about what human beings do through culture that I find really, really interesting' (SS).

It's all about changing things...making things better' (KK).

Even though it can be argued that we are all more 'big picture' aware than we were in the 1970s (Helgeson, 1990, p. 25), this orientation contrasts with Mintzberg's managers, whose daily activities focused almost entirely on the immediate and the short-term.

My cases (like Helgeson's and unlike Mintzberg's) had a sense of detachment from their jobs, which seemed to facilitate the playing – and encouragement - of different 'roles', often described in familial terms.

We definitely have different roles, like a family does. People come to the fore at different times... (KK).

They likened their own role-playing more to foregrounding different facets of their personality than to carrying out discrete functions (e.g. figurehead, monitor, negotiator) or assuming different 'characters'.

I think one of the reasons I like my job is that...I can be totally myself (KK).

They also pursued important interests and priorities outside work to help them change perspective or switch off: snowboarding (AU), gig-rowing (SS) and being a new aunt and parent-to-be (KK). However, though they exhibited a certain ironic detachment from their position and a marked disregard for career enhancement, they identified very strongly with their organisation, particularly its practices and values - of which more later.

There was a clear correlation with both writers, however, in their development and maintenance of a strong network of contacts, partners, stakeholders and peers. And the ready sharing information (news, stories, knowledge and things they had seen) was a particularly strong and integral part of their daily 'doings': perhaps less the static "neck in the hourglass, standing between his own organization and a network of outside contacts" (Mintzberg, 1973, p. 52) more the mobile "transmitter - picking up signals from everywhere, then beeping them out to where they need to go" (Helgesen, 1990, p. 27).

My job is about giving away trade secrets' (KK).

This strand of the analysis suggests that in some of their activities, cultural managers may not be too different from managers in other fields/kinds of organisation: the constant activity, the preference for live communication, the shifts in conversational register, and the maintenance of good networking links outside the organisation. It also points to the likelihood of a gender 'variable', and in common with Helgesen's women, these managers kept the longer term in view, identified interruptions and active information-sharing as a core part of the job, had a life outside work and identified roles informally (rather than formally) as facets of their personality.

There are, however, some both/and factors in the pattern of doings that this type and level of analysis does not address (and this is in addition to the ontological and epistemological issues set out in the literature review). The focus of these kinds of studies is 'synchronic' rather than 'diachronic', so there is little sense of process over time and how activities might link together. By

extension, there is not much concentration on the link (assuming there is one) between 'doings' and 'outcomes'. In addition, while such investigations dissect the activities of managers as individuals, there is little mention of how the role fits with the rest of the organisation (Hales, 1996, 2001) or of the manager's participation in group work and group-based decision-making (of which – as conveyed in each day in the life – I observed a lot in my fieldwork). In short, the range and extent of the both/and-ness identified in the pattern of doings is not fully reflected here.

Finally, the studies mentioned are all located in large scale for-profit and (in Helgesen's case) non-governmental organisations. The cases here manage micro-enterprises; their organisations are engaged in cultural production and distribution; and they operate within and across a mixed economy of state subsidy, trading income, private sponsorship and philanthropic giving. In terms of scale, context and 'sector', then, these enterprises have a specificity which may also have a bearing on 'what cultural managers do'.

In the next strand, attention turns to issues of context, scale and sector.

### **Thematic strand (2): Further empirical talk about cultural management**

In this second thematic strand, the data and initial pattern of doings are compared with the dimensions and categories suggested by the small amount of empirical work in the cultural management field, to assess points of similarity, contrast and further elucidation. Of particular relevance is that which focuses on small scale arts organisations, small scale theatre organisations and the role of the manager and producer in theatre and dance.

As set out in the literature review, cultural management – whether it is considered to be “pre-paradigmatic” (Mercer, 2006); an emerging sub-discipline of management (Evrard & Colbert, 2000); an interdisciplinary academic combination of management theory and cultural studies (Hagoort, 2009); a reactive and utilitarian practice in search of a discourse (DeVereaux, 2009); or a focus of critical sociological attention (Bourdieu, 1996; DiMaggio, 1997; Chiapello, 1998; Kirchberg & Zembylas, 2010) – has been habitually depicted in terms of *divides*, *difference*, *deficit* with more recent emphasis on *dauntlessness*. In contrast, empirical work in the field can be characterised in terms of *invisibility*, *informality* and *isomorphism*, each of which is now

considered in turn, and connected and contrasted with the data and pattern of doings.

- ***Invisibility***

The notion of being “hidden from view” (Summerton, 1996; Summerton & Kay, 1999) as a result of working at micro-scale was voiced by the cases.

They perceived large-scale theatre organisations as very different from their own and defined their own activities in contrast or opposition to them.

...because we are a tiny organisation amongst very big organisations, with much more funding and much more public profile, I feel as if I have my foot in the door and that my job is to get as many people into the room [creative space] as possible (SS).

[Name of large scale venue]: we do the work and they call it theirs (KK).

This was tied up with the view that larger theatre organisations were more likely to be run by men, particularly those belonging to the ‘Oxbridge Mafia’.

Women and the scale thing...I think [the presence of women in senior positions] thins out the more money you are dealing with (KK).

They also commented on the dearth of men managing micro-scale theatre organisations:

It’s multi-tasking all the time which is what women do as second nature. I think if men did it, it would be a very different job because they couldn’t do the ridiculous number of tasks, cleaning cupboards out, ordering the stationery, unblocking the toilets...(SS).

None expressed any desire to move on to mid- or large-scale organisations as all felt that working at a small and micro- scale carried distinct advantages for them in their work and contributed very directly to job satisfaction. This was where they wanted to stay.

I would never want to operate on a large scale. I think people assume that if you are small scale, you really want to get big, and I would hate it, because what you get [in a small organisation] is quite a lot of control. And that’s exciting...if someone rings up and says they want to bring a piece of work...I can go, actually, yes, let’s do it. And that’s very unusual. Anything more than small scale and you wouldn’t get to do that, would you? There

would be such a lot of bureaucracy and there would be lots of timetabling issues. You just wouldn't see that proximity to the problem (SS).

...small organisations, just being able to handle uncertainty and not being related to [hierarchical] power and all that stuff....it's got to be where the innovation happens, hasn't it? (KK).

They seemed to associate working in smaller scale organisations with closer proximity to the work, easier risk-taking, increased hands-on activity, the ability to be more flexible and reactive, and having direct involvement in determining and securing the organisation's future. This idea of a positive motivation to work at a small scale is again reflected in the existing empirical studies, e.g.

People choose to work in [small scale arts enterprises] because they value the opportunity to do what they consider meaningful work and to have some control over it, seeing an opportunity to influence both the way they do their work and the results of their endeavours. The small enterprise often exhibits valid but distinctly different management styles and working practices, motivations and priorities as well as different organisational configuration to large organisations (Summerton & Kay, 1999, p. 12).

The idea of invisibility in terms of working role and a difficulty in articulating what they do (Beirne & Knight, 2004; Hutchins et al., 2007) emerged very strongly from the data.

I asked each case two questions: what is your job and what do you think your days are made up of? The first they had no real difficulty in answering:

I head up 15 producers so I coordinate it and keep it on track and do the planning and fundraising (KK).

I think I kind of...I don't know if I do it, but I think what I should be doing is creating a scaffolding for people to deliver creative work to young people, artists and the public at large. I think it's that (SS).

I think that my job is managing the wellbeing of MTH, so that's people, profile, productions, and finances I guess (AU).

The second question they found much more challenging.

Oh God! That's really hard. I often wonder what the hell I do here, how come I've always got a massive list at the end of the week. Like, what do I actually do on a day to day basis? (KK).

Their responses tended to be much more elliptical, and indeed, incremental.

I think a lot of it is just communication. It's responding to people's ideas or events, or leads. I spend most of the gap between meetings really just going through emails and working out where I have to be when, so just putting dates in my diary and checking all my commitments and how I am going to get to them and things like that...What do I do? I like working somewhere where there is quite a defined strategic plan so that I can remember to do the big stuff. So I try and tackle...I try and break down something big into little tasks and then work my way through it...On a day to day basis, talking to my colleagues, quite a lot of talking, quite a lot of writing. Some thinking, but I reckon thinking happens more often outside, (KK).

I tend to work up collaborations and partnerships which then become projects ...quite a lot of my stuff is about strategic thinking and where we should go next...I am quite good at just making lists and then I find at the end of the day that I haven't ticked anything off my list...and that's really down to workload ...I get quite a lot of telephone calls saying, can you? Is it possible? (SS).

AU answered the question more concretely by describing what she was going to do that day – a combination of dealing with emails, catching up with people, meetings etc.

All focussed, not surprisingly, on activities they undertook in the office and in internal and external meetings. What was therefore invisible from their accounts was the work they all reported they did at home and for which they needed a chunk of undisturbed time: funding applications, planning documents and reports.

A preference to stay out of the limelight was expressed by two cases, the first for reasons of principle: 'I think as a producer it's not about you. If you want it to be about you, then go and make your own work...I'd rather stay in the background moving things long' (KK) and the second through personal

preference: 'I get a buzz from quietly achieving. I've got no desire to be loudly achieving but now and then I realise that I've helped make that pattern...' (AU).

Two expressed awareness of an 'inherited' divide between artists and managers: 'The 'them and us' in theatre is a nightmare' (KK) and 'You get that terrible "I'm an artist, do what I tell you" '(SS). All three doubted whether others in their organisation (or with whom they worked outside) really understood what they did.

Even though I am the company director, my role is very undiscovered territory really and I think quite a lot of people even in my own organisation say, what part does she play? (SS).

They were acutely conscious, however, that they became very visible when things went wrong, and fear of this kind of failure was a source of considerable stress.

Everything that doesn't happen, or is not functioning, or is not going well, it's my responsibility (SS).

All commented that being observed caused them to reflect on the visibility, invisibility and legitimacy of what they do.

...having someone shadow me means I must be doing something! I've got a proper job! I'm a proper person!...I've sort of suddenly become aware that I am actually in charge of this...I have become more aware of being in a leadership role by having someone shadow me. And I think our conversations have been useful...often make you think about things and it's a bit of time to reflect rather than just do, so that's good (KK).

I think people, on the days when you have observed me, have respected me more *because* you were observing me...and I think they had to look at me in a new way because you were looking at me...I think [now] people have to reflect on what my role and function in the organisation is and why I am the one who does the questioning, the checking... (SS).

...I have found it useful and almost a kind of support I think, really. You feel how lucky you are doing a real job or a proper job...it's kind of been nice even in a tiny way to make me think about how I was doing things or why I

am doing things, not necessarily changing them but being a little more conscious [even if it only] lasts about 30 seconds! (AU).

All were conscious of the influence of 'rationalistic', 'proper' management ideas and the likelihood that they would be regarded as a bit chaotic and disorganised by comparison. They all wondered if they were 'doing it right'.

KK wondered if she ought to be 'leading from the front', 'bringing the sword out' more or doing proper business-type 'schmoozing' but also felt that such activities weren't quite right for her.

SS saw it as 'alright to be a bit happy and grubby and chaotic if the result is that you are offering massive opportunities to people who genuinely wouldn't get those opportunities'. Having recently recruited a finance officer who had worked all his career (until the recession) in private and public sector organisations, SS expressed delight that even though he had expected everyone in an arts organisation to be 'ditzzy', he had been very impressed by how committed and hard-working everyone was.

AU had mixed feelings about the plethora of plans and strategies she had to produce and then – when time permitted – update. On the one hand she felt these documents provided a kind of 'reassurance for ourselves to stop us going mad' and on the other she didn't want to get into a position where she couldn't do something 'if it wasn't in the plan...because that [would be] kind of be the end of who we are, really'. That said, all three organisations had coherent and detailed policies and plans in place (which had helped them secure NPO status) and were regarded as very well-managed by their principle funder, Arts Council England.

Thus, none of them appeared to be behaving as passive absorbers or 'victims' of external management ideas; rather they seemed consciously to reflect on their appropriateness to their work and to their organisations (Hutchins et al, 2007, p. 82). In addition, there was more than a hint of ironic detachment in their depictions of how they might be seen to 'fall short', as illustrated in the rather spicy language two of them reserved for business consultants coming in to arts organisations to 'sort you out'.

- ***Informality (flexibility and fun)***

Once again, there are parallels between the data and the reviewed literature.



Essentially, such [organic] organizations are low on formality and hierarchy and depend instead for their purpose and cohesion on shared values and commitment (Fitzgibbon, 2001, p. 157).

A value-orientated underpinning and a strong sense of vocation were not in short supply with these managers.

What I'm interested in is helping [artists] be better (KK).

I think what really keeps me at it is that you see the best in human beings. When you get it right, you see the best of human beings and it's a bit of a fix isn't it? Wow! And the infinite capabilities, capacity of human beings to be ingenious and overcome things...for me it's not necessarily the culture projects, it's about what human beings do through culture that I find really, really interesting (SS).

This last point is particularly striking. It is not only the desire to change and progress things that is the important driver; the *means*, the art, and the provision of *particular kinds* of opportunities to bring out the best (rather than mitigating the worst) in people seems to be just as vital.

Collaborative working and the need for (and time consuming nature of) consultation was also mentioned as a bedrock part of their work.

A huge thing...is thinking about how to approach [changes] with the staff and how best to do it, how to put people together in order that it will work with the least possible disruption and make it possible for there to be proper consultation. People feel...all the stuff you know, all on the vote, that we have agreed, all that stuff takes an inordinate amount of time... (SS).

I think when you're working on a limited budget, when you are working with a small group, you actually need to scope out who can bring what to the table... (AU).

Experiential learning (Kay, 2011; Summerton et al., 2006), was also clearly valued and endorsed by all three cases.

How do you become a producer, then? Learning as you go along. Well, there are courses aren't there, and I guess if I was 18 I would probably want to do a course, I don't know. What I said to the people [at a

conference on producing] in Birmingham was, I would see as much work as possible...and if I saw something I really liked, I would see if that company needed some help so I could get in on an exciting piece of work. But I did it in perhaps an easy way and that's I got jobs and that's another way to do it, and obviously if you get a job you start to understand things better and you get all this expertise, all these people to feed off and you start to understand that it's not scary to talk to them...Even starting in the marketing department or whatever is really useful...that's a good way of becoming a producer (KK).

...the only people I know who have done this job are MJ and SP, so you probably sub-consciously model yourself on them...I said to them at the beginning, "I've no idea what this job is really!" (SS).

The flexibility associated with informal working was also seen as a plus in their work.

The ethos of anything being possible. It really does feel like an enormously flexible job where...you are allowed and expected to respond to your own instincts and I think if I get frustrated with the job it's because I'm not being imaginative enough which is lovely rather than being squished (KK).

Fun (Lyon, 1974) was mentioned as an important part of company ethos particularly by AU, for whom it was a significant motivator.

I've never laughed so much as when I am going to a MTH show, so that is what makes me want to keep on doing it...we all take our jobs seriously but we take having a laugh whilst doing our jobs seriously as well (AU).

And none of us...not that anybody ever takes it all too seriously but we do get stressed and it is kind of like we were all in it together (AU).

You know, [referring to the difficulty of getting prompt email responses from colleagues] I would say there's too much stuff going on in an informal process but actually, probably, that's just what MTH is, as opposed to the Theatre Royal! (AU).

KK contrasted the fun elements with their opposite.

Yes, it's definitely fun...although the few weeks before a show goes out, you can't believe it was ever fun and you wonder what the hell you are

doing. Oh dear, and opening night goes badly and it's the worst feeling in the world. It's like having a party or something that no-one comes to. It feels horrible (KK).

None had an up to date job description or a formal career plan ('No. Just to work in arts administration really' KK) and each had moved from job to job (whether in the same or different organisations) because they happened to be in the right place at the right time, or they were bored, or their interests shifted and they wanted to try something new (so very similar to Summerton et al., 2006). None had a clear idea what they would do if they weren't doing their current job (in fact they were rather bemused by the question) although top-of-the head suggestions included gardening or something facilitative (SS), teaching (KK) or a return to film-production work (AU).

- ***Isomorphism***

Each case spoke of a very close connection ("constant switching" Kuesters, 2010) between what they do and the art produced by their organisations:

Being called a producer signals that you are closer to the work... [and] there is more of a crossover [now] between the idea and how to make the idea happen and that's a good thing, I think, that meshing of that (KK)

I see myself as an editor in a way. You come in with friendly criticism (AU).

I model the ethos of the organisation by it being very clear that it's an artist-led organisation and that creative work is what we are all about, and everything is focused on that...I think you demonstrate that by you know, always going in on Tuesday and Wednesday nights before I go home and look up what's going on on the floor and try to sit for five or ten minutes and see what everyone's doing (SS).

Even though they were occasionally infuriated by the behaviour of the artists with whom they worked, they clearly relished their contact and relationships with them.

I love talking to artists. I love it when any new company comes into the organisation. I go and talk to them with absolute pleasure because I just love artists, I love what they do (SS).

Why wouldn't you want to work with artists? (KK).

The way in which AU described her relationship with MTH's Artistic Director was certainly closer to the partnership approach identified in more recent empirical research (e.g. MacNeill, Tonks & Reynolds, 2012):

I think we (AU and her Artistic Director) are pretty in tune with each other in terms of MTH. We just get on really well and we have a laugh and I don't think we have ever even had to have words with each other about anything (AU).

All expressed a clear understanding of the interrelationship between their work and the wellbeing of their artists and the organisation as a whole.

You're always writing, let's face it, writing all the fucking reports that nobody actually reads, Sue. All the annual reports, it's just awful! But unless you write the reports, and all that justification happens, you just wouldn't be here (SS).

However, my cases did not – with the exception of KK in her description of her management style as 'very producery' – articulate any isomorphic relationship between their daily activities and those taking place in the studio or rehearsal room. Admittedly Beirne and Knight (2002a, 2002b, 2004) suggest that 'arts-led' reflective management is something that cultural managers (and managers more generally) *could* learn, so maybe such a notion is not (yet?) on these cultural managers' radar. More significantly, perhaps, these authors do not set out what the specifics (as opposed to the principles) of arts-led reflective management might be, indicating that the "how" in contrast to the "what" is a matter for further research (2002a, p. 88). The indicators of any isomorphic relationship are therefore difficult to discern from what my cases *reported* in interview. This issue will be revisited in Thematic strand (4) towards the end of this chapter.

To summarise, then, in this second strand I have ascertained similarities between the beliefs and views expressed by these cultural managers and the findings of a number of empirical studies in the field. Their doings do indeed seem to be characterised by invisibility (of scale of organisation and their own role), informality (in professional relationships, working styles, learning methods and career development) and closeness to the artists and artistic output of their organisations. In their talk, they also exhibit awareness (if not appreciation) of

the elements of discourse with which cultural management is associated: divide, difference and deficit (though not the more recent dauntlessness). Although they conveyed a strong sense of purpose (the 'why'), they were less able to articulate what they do, or how they do it (apart from informally and busily).

Analytically, there are some interesting possibilities that arise here.

First, could it be that the micro-scale of their organisations actively *requires* these managers to shuttle and shift between interdependent polarities as indicated in the pattern of doings? In other words, they *have* to keep an eye on individual/collective concerns and inside/outside issues, because unlike larger organisations where strategic and pragmatic areas of managerial work might be formally divided up between departments, here they are largely the responsibility of one person. Thus, if they didn't keep register-shifting in the way described, they wouldn't be able to get the work done. Moreover, they clearly like the very real agency this gives them, which provides a useful counterpoint to the more routine aspects of their daily work.

Second, is the lack of clarity about what they do (on their part and that of their colleagues) symptomatic, not just of busyness, but of the Heath Robinson boundaryless-ness of their remit? If there is no-one else there to unblock the toilets, then you just have to fashion a metal coat-hanger into the right shape and do it yourself, regardless of what it says in your job description.

Third, is informality both essential for their negotiation of interdependent polarities (particularly tight/loose and means/ends) *and* a welcome consequence of so doing? In such an environment, organising efficiently *and* mucking about, being passionate about the company's work *and* preoccupied with the money are easily accommodated in ways they might not be in a more formal set-up. Moreover, the cases all seem to relish working in such an environment.

Fourth, is the both/and-ness of the pattern of doings not only a necessary way of getting the work done, but also a vital means of maintaining a close connection with the artistic work of their organisation, and importantly, with the artists who make it? Once again this contact seems to be both highly motivating and a much valued reward.

This type and level of data analysis supports and progresses a consideration of what cultural managers do with reference to empirical work in the cultural management field. What it does not do, however, is get beyond the conjectural to the detail of 'what is going on' in their shuttling and register-shifting, and what that detail might add up to. There is more to tease out here of a conceptual nature. For that, it is necessary to compare and contrast the data with notions of organising, and very specifically, sensemaking as organising in action.

### **Thematic strand (3): A sensemaking perspective**

The purpose of this strand, then, is to see how the data might resonate with a sensemaking perspective. After all, as set out in the literature review, like a stick of rock, this study is not only bounded by sensemaking (resource), it also has sensemaking written through it (topic).

The both/and-ness, the interdependent polarities that make up the pattern of doings certainly chime with Weick's seven properties (or distinguishing characteristics) of sensemaking, and in what follows, there is more than an echo of the findings in Porac et al.'s (1989) study of managers in a group of Scottish sweater manufacturers, as summarised in Weick (1995a).

My cases' strong identification with the work and values of their organisation and the feeling of distinctiveness this gave them relative to others, afforded them a robust framework within which to place stimuli and work out ways forward. This traffic is two-way, however. **Identity** is a pre-requisite for sensemaking *and* what is out there (by way of stimuli) impacts on that sense of self, individually and organisationally. This is most obviously reflected in my cases' mediating of their organisation to others and others to the organisation. Again, 'shuttling' (both/and) is a necessary part of what they do.

There is a marked **retrospective** aspect to their activities too. They focus on it explicitly in company and other internal meetings: this is what 'three minute updates' and project post-mortems are for. They do it implicitly when they practise in advance of events and encounters – a process that brings past experience into the present and projects it into the future. And they do it with uncanny prescience when they say things like:

I don't really know what I think about it yet. Maybe I'll work it out as I talk;

and

I reckon we've reinterpreted after the event.

Their constant activity can also be tied in with **enactment** (the third characteristic of sensemaking). Weick's enactment is all about the ways in which people create the circumstances they face (while those circumstances also create them), and the paper-thin gap between perception and action: the 'acting thoughtfully' and 'thinking actingly' referred to earlier. The notion of enactment gives the lie to either/or in preference to both/and; it is primarily about action (verbs) and subjective interpretations that become objectified as 'the way we do things around here' (nouns). Thus my cases simultaneously hold the big picture *and* concentrate on pragmatic detail in order to get things done; and constantly shift their conversational register.

These cultural managers are also inveterately **social** in their daily activities.

Conduct is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those others are imagined [e.g. funders] or physically present [colleagues] (Weick, 1995a, p. 39).

Likewise, talk is of primary importance:

Words induce stable connections, establish stable identities to which people can orient..., bind people's time to projects..., and signify important information (p, 41).

And yet, any kind of shared understanding between people has to be continually negotiated.

My cases converse, tell stories (and otherwise communicate in writing) on a constant basis. Meetings and stories are not only the ways in which they keep the social wheels oiled; they are the means by which the organisation is talked into existence and sustained – both internally and externally. Meetings also provide the face-to-face fora in which situations of ambiguity and equivocality can most effectively be explored, discussed and subjected to a variety of inputs, information and interpretation. No wonder meetings take up the bulk of their time and go off on so many tangents.

The pattern of doings outlined earlier, conveys a sense, not only of my cases being very busy, but also being in the thick of things; of **ongoing** alertness. For Weick, such alertness means staying on the lookout for interruptions, which

then trigger and occasion sensemaking. This resonates with my cases' frequent shifts between fixity of purpose *and* ongoing flexibility (frequently in response to delays, misunderstandings and others' unreliability, for example); their alternating between speed (moments of quick decisive action) *and* slowness (time spent listening, asking questions, bottoming things out); and their passion for the company's artistic work *alongside* their continuous preoccupation with 'the money'.

The importance of **cues**, for Weick, is closely bound up with context. Cues are extracted (or bracketed) from the ongoing flow of things, according to their "salience as a consequence of context" and "their capacity to evoke action" (Weick, 1995a, pp. 53-54). Extracted cues are connected with prevailing frames (contextual norms, values, ways of doing things) in order to make sense of what is going on. Conversely when cues and frames don't connect up, then sensemaking is interrupted. Returning to the thick descriptions of a day in the life, the issue of the photograph on the Tin poster was a case in point. One of AU and MTH's frames was the importance of 'doing right' by people, particularly those who comprise the company's pool of performers. An extracted cue was the intention to use the photograph of a performer who might not be recruited to the eventual role. The sense between the frame and the cue was interrupted, leading to a discussion (action) and decision to find a more salient alternative. My cases' continuous shuttling between issues of means *and* ends, could also be seen as further example of sensemaking between cues *and* frames.

**Plausibility** is the seventh and final characteristic, a term Weick uses to denote "pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and sufficient instrumentality" (1995a, p. 57). As mentioned, it is plausible (rather than accurate) stories which are necessary to keep things moving, triggering more action and so on. Take, for example, the instance when SS was drafting copy for a letter to 'gatekeepers' who might have been interested in bringing others along to see a production about a soldier in Afghanistan, or when KK was helping her dance producer colleague prepare for a meeting with a funder. The aim (in both cases) was to produce an account that would be plausible (and persuasive) enough to stimulate a particular action (purchasing tickets...extending and expanding a funding package) on the part of others (such that sensemaking became *sensegiving*).



Having taken each of these characteristics in turn (identity, retrospective, enactment, social, ongoing, extracted cues, plausibility) there appears to be a good match with my data. My cases seem to tick the boxes as proficient sensemakers – *even* to the extent that there could be some “high reliability organizing” going on.

Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) define high reliability organisations (HROs) as those – like hospital accident and emergency departments, flight crews and fire-fighting teams – which have “developed ways of acting and styles of learning that enable them to manage the unexpected better than other organizations”, and which therefore offer a template to other organisations wanting to “better organize for high reliability”. This, HROs do by exercising **five capabilities**, which are particularly effective in activating and inculcating the seven characteristics of sensemaking just described. These capabilities are:

- tracking small failures;
- resisting simplification;
- being sensitive to operations;
- maintaining capabilities for resilience; and
- taking advantage of shifting locations of expertise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

The organisations managed by my cases are evidently *not* HROs in the strict sense of the term and it is not the intention here to draw literal parallels between theatre making and rescuing people from burning buildings. Nevertheless these managers do see their organisations as operating under ongoing threat (funding cuts are always around the corner; under-resourcing is the norm; reputation is not stable), a view that is supported by the subsidised arts’ own rhetoric. Thus it could be argued, that – as with HROs – their working context militates against the “expectation of reliable continuation” of the work and the organisation itself. Furthermore, the number of core staff in micro-scale theatre organisations is no greater than a flight crew or fire-fighting team, so the kind of close, face-to-face contact deemed essential to the latter, is also likely to be found in the former.

If the five HRO capabilities are compared with the thick descriptions of a day in the life and the resultant pattern of doings, some intriguing parallels can be drawn.

In terms of ***scrutinising small failures***, these cultural managers were constantly on the alert for things which might slip or which were not being attended to – KK described this as ‘gap-spotting’. These were things which might threaten the work, the reputation, or future viability of the organisation. This does not mean they were risk averse – more that the risks implicit in the artistic work must be safeguarded by mitigating potential hazards elsewhere. Far from being a cliché, there *are* no laurels to rest on: these kinds of organisations are only as good as their last piece of work.

While my cases dealt with straightforward issues in a quick, no-nonsense way, matters which were more complex and important for the longer term (e.g. planning for a touring co-production; considering how to handle an anticipated end-of-year deficit and budget for the following year; shaping a period of organisational development) were handled iteratively over time in a number of meetings with different people. This was in order to focus as many brains on the issue as possible; to ensure effective consultation; to check and challenge what was emerging; and to arrive at the best possible way forward. These could be seen as instances where ***simplification was resisted*** and categories continually refined; in other words, where there was an essential reluctance (paraphrasing Marion Milner) to turn a doodle into a recognisable drawing too soon.

Being ***sensitive to operations as well as strategy (or watching what you’re doing and what emerges)*** is again most clearly reflected in my cases’ continuous switching of topic and register – between principles and practice; between the long term and the immediate; and between the remembered and the here and now. The question ‘what is going on here?’ was their leitmotiv, before, during and after action.

When people have well-developed situational awareness, they can make continuous adjustments that prevent errors from accumulating and enlarging (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, pp. 12-13).

Thus, at BTH, as soon as SS became aware of a likely and unanticipated bottleneck in the cafe/bar, she enlisted her colleagues to sort it out.

The fourth capability – ***resilience or making do with the resources you have*** – implies an ability, not only to detect and contain errors, but to bounce back from mistakes when they are (inevitably) made. For Weick and Sutcliffe this necessitates “keeping errors small and improvising workarounds that allow the system to keep functioning” (2007, p. 14). For my cases, this is most closely mirrored in their movement along the tight/loose continuum – so, giving direction and facilitating and coaching others; being properly accountable and bending the rules. In addition, they habitually sought ways of making best use of limited resources, for instance, one project (for which funding was not available) doubling up as a contribution to a festival for which it was. Advice, expertise and resources (e.g. the company van, blankets for outdoor events, an organisation’s finance officer) were readily shared between them and other organisations and – as previously mentioned – there was well-honed learning through doing and learning from others in the field.

The fifth and final capability – ***listening or deferring to expertise*** – is perhaps easier and more immediate in small teams and micro-enterprises which are not subject to rigid hierarchical layers. HROs “push decision making down and around” to whoever has the best knowledge of a particular area: thus in BTH, SS deferred to the person with marketing expertise; in THB, KB looked to E-J for insight into dance development; and in MTH, AU was clear that the eventual decision over the face on the Tin poster, rested with EG, the communications manager. In all three cases, however, final responsibility still remained with the Executive Producer, Company or General Manager, so others were accorded scope and security in exercising their expertise. In the discussions observed, these managers listened as much, if not more than, they spoke, and asking questions seemed to be a main part of the job; helping other people to shape/resolve things.

I guess that is kind of what I feel my job is, is to try and soak everything up and then turn it into some bullet points at the end! (AU).

Weick and Sutcliffe conclude that HROs are successful because these capabilities enable them to act mindfully – by which they mean:

... organiz[ing] themselves in such a way that they are better able to notice the unexpected in the making and halt its development (2007, p. 18).

Not only, then, does the data resonate with the seven properties of sensemaking, to the extent that it provides a plausible conceptual account of 'what is going on', but there are also parallels between some of the doings of my three cultural managers and high reliability organising, even if they are not high reliability organisations. This in turn supports Weick and Sutcliffe's assertion that practices adopted by HROs "to maintain continuing alertness to the unexpected in the face of the pressure to take cognitive shortcuts" (2007, p. 19) are of use and relevance to *non*-HROs, regardless of differences in scale and purpose of the organisation. The unexpected, they point out, does not necessarily lead to fatalities or large scale disaster: its meaning is *contextual*, and yet regardless of setting, they argue that it is invariably the case that "trouble starts small and is signalled by weak symptoms that are easy to miss, especially when expectations are strong and mindfulness weak" (p. 20). Hence, my cases needed to be constantly on the alert, particularly in relation to issues of organisational reputation, staff support and supervision, funding and finance.

Once we understand the context, the precautions, the assumptions, the focus of attention, and what [is] ignored, it becomes clear that many organisations are just as exposed to threats as HROs are, and just as much in need of mindfulness (p. 20).

So far, so good. And yet in returning again to the data, the thick descriptions and the pattern of doings, a curious area of discrepancy becomes apparent.

While the '**unexpected**' could indeed be troublesome for my cases, theirs was a context in which the unexpected was frequently deemed to be an *opportunity*, to which they responded in ways that were different to setting out "worst-case scenarios", "detecting hazards" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 65) "coping", "halting", "containing" and "swift restoration of system function". Here they were more likely to respond with passion, enthusiasm, excitement, story-telling and play. Furthermore, when addressing big, exciting, important or serious issues, their approach – as well as being collaborative rather than hierarchically singular – was characterised by a marked *delay* in moving from a position of 'not-knowing', ambiguity and equivocality to a decision and (contingent) way forward. It is perhaps relevant to note here that the art work produced,

promoted, or facilitated in and through their working context invariably *relies* on a degree of unexpectedness in its origination, composition, performance and reception.

Could there be something here about the impact of context on the *ways* in which the unexpected is framed, experienced and dealt with? Does a *positive* perception (or at least a very high tolerance) of the unexpected make any difference to resultant behaviours and doings? Might mindful managing in a setting that favours, trades in, even *needs* the unexpected, be additionally or differently inflected in some way?

This is not to call into question Weick and Sutcliffe's findings; after all there are strong connections which have already been outlined. Nor do I wish to fall into the archetypal trap of suggesting that in the arts *everything* is done differently, to include a wholesale rejection of order and control. My purpose in asking 'what do cultural managers do?' is to improve the way we *talk* about their doings and the ways in which they accomplish or enact them. And as is implied in this chapter's identification and intertwining of different analytical strands, there may be a degree of mixing and matching involved in answering that question.

In fact Weick himself queries "the emphasis in organizational theory on order and control [which] often handicaps theorists when they want to understand the processes of creativity and innovation" (1998, p. 543), asserting that "[t]he liability can be corrected if we learn how to talk about the process of improvisation" and that "[m]anagerial activities, which are often dominated by language and conversation, often become synonymous with improvisation" (p. 543). Here, he perceives that improvisation "deals with the unforeseen...works without prior stipulation...works with the unexpected" (p. 544).

In the spirit of 'the art of...', Weick draws on the jazz field (particularly Berliner, 1994) and theatre (Mangham & Pye, 1991) to suggest that both improvisation and organising *share* features such as simultaneous reflection and action, simultaneous rule creation and rule following, patterns of mutually expected responses, action informed by codes, continuous mixing of the expected with the novel, and a heavy reliance on intuitive grasp and imagination (Weick, 1998, p. 549). Here, the metaphorical vehicle is once again improvised jazz or theatre *performance* and is an example of the extension of "improvisatory principles beyond the theatre itself" (Frost & Yarrow, 1990, p. 15). The central focus is not

theatre [or jazz] improvisation in all its complexity and as a topic in its own right; it is what a particular 'take' on it might offer to the understanding of a completely different phenomenon i.e. fire-fighting or corporate management.

So, for example, there is little recognition that, for example, within a contemporary theatre context, improvisation has uses *beyond* impro and the kind of actor-training methods referred to in Crossan (1998) and Vera and Crossan (2004). As noted by Heddon and Milling, improvisation:

...might involve the repetition and revision of breathing exercises, or physical, dance-based contact between performers, or everyday tasks, or verbal interrogation, or character-based interaction. It is the specific nature of the task, game, rules or structure within which improvisation occurs that conditions the possible outcomes, and contributes to the style of the resultant [not necessarily improvised] performance (2006, p. 9).

Significantly, they then add:

Of course, improvisation is only part of the process of making work, which might also include editing, designing, structuring, choreographing, writing and rehearsing (p. 9).

Likewise, the companies in which my cases work use improvisation in these ways, as *one* means (*in combination with others*) of making theatre work.

While my cases' shuttling and continuous shifting could be seen as instances of improvisation, the data and pattern of doings also suggest engagement in slower, iterative and collaborative working out of ways forward.

The question that arises, then, is might there be further analytical benefit in considering the doings of managers in theatre-based organisations alongside the processes and strategies of making theatre work, *in an epistemological rather than a metaphorical sense?*

In other words, does theatre *making* have anything to do with theatre *managing*? And might there be any connection with the issue of the 'unexpected', as alluded to earlier?

It is to these questions that the data analysis now turns.

#### **Thematic strand (4): Devising for theatre**

All three of the cases manage micro-organisations dedicated, in different ways, to the development of contemporary theatre. THB commissions and produces new work across the spectrum of performance (from circus to soundwalks); offers bespoke artist support and training, runs a user-generated web resource; undertakes strategic research, and develops national and international exchange opportunities. BTH is a venue that responds to the needs of young people and emerging and professional artists in Plymouth and the South West region; a first house for emerging companies (which in the past included Matthew Bourne's Adventures in Motion Pictures and Frantic Assembly); and a focus for the development of socially engaged practice through community theatre, youth theatre and dance. MTH is a leading regional rural touring theatre company firmly rooted in Cornwall that produces 'fresh and accessible' adaptations of classic plays and promotes new writing, while experimenting with innovative production techniques and new ways of staging open air performances and bringing 'big' shows to little venues as a way of building new audiences.

As noted, all three managers expressed a passionate and enduring commitment to the theatre work produced, facilitated or promoted by their organisation; the values and practices that underpin it; and the colleagues and users who make or help deliver it. These (rather than salary or status) were the elements that got them involved in the first place and which now kept them in post, mitigating the low pay, stress and (occasionally) boring aspects of their day to day work.

I tend to think about the artists making the best thing they can make. So in this job it's the artists. We need them...I just well up when I see people really putting themselves out there doing something amazing, or even trying to do something amazing. I need the stories...I just really need live performance. (KK).

The work is totally important. I think if there wasn't creative work of quality coming out, it would just be a ridiculous thing to do... I love watching young people come into the organisation and just watching them grow and seeing where they get to...and providing these opportunities and scaffolding for people to make their own work I find very moving (SS).

I still probably do it because of the people that I work with...I don't know, there's just something that feels different about MTH, that is kind of genuine and authentic...and OK, some parts of it may be a bit rough round the edges, but its heart's in the right place and seeing loads of people have a really good night... is what makes me want to keep on doing it (AU).

The purpose of this thematic strand is to explore whether or to what degree this closeness and commitment to both artists and their work might plausibly have an impact on what these cultural managers do, and how they do it, taking those doings *beyond* merely servicing the creative work and ethos of their organisation.

Here, the analysis is taken further by overlaying the data and pattern of doings with the perspective of devising for theatre.

Devising (or collaborative creation) – as a way of making performance – has developed and evolved over the past fifty years or so across Europe, America and Australia. As set out in the literature review, its origins lie in the anti-establishment period of the late 1960s, when groups of actors sought alternatives to hierarchical director-led and text based theatre.

A devised theatre product... rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted... is the work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration (Oddey, 1994, p. 1).

Indeed, Heddon and Milling maintain that what differentiates devising from other forms of theatre-making is that “in the vast majority of cases...nothing material [in the sense of a text or score] pre-exists the collaboration of those involved in realising a performance” (2006, p. 222).

Thus theatre making can start with anything – a piece of music, a fragment of text, movement, an image, object, or notion – as a stimulus for (usually) collaborative exploration and experimentation. And this kind of process can also lead to a different kind of performance structure – less linear, more multi-layered and fragmented – as a reflection of the collaboration and multi-inputs that went into the creation of the piece (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 221).



However, definitions of devising “... are unreliable and constantly in flux” and “it would be misleading to suggest that this umbrella term signifies any particular dramatic genre or a specific style of performance” (Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007, p. 4). Instead, Govan et al. propose that devising is best described “in the plural – as *processes* of experimentation and sets of creative *strategies* – rather than a single methodology...” (p. 7, italics in original).

It is also noted that while devising invariably includes improvisation as an important part of the “creative development of ideas” phase, improvisation here does not in and of itself make a performance; it is one part in a longer and larger process of making work.

Heddon and Milling take to task some of the rhetoric that has built up around devising since its emergence as a “radical disjunction” in the 1960s. These they characterise as “sound-bite” qualities; ideals like “a means to incite social change... [and] the negating of the gap between art and life” that serve to accord devising a kind of “mythical status”.

The same writers observe that – as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century – the binary opposition between devised theatre and text-based work does not always hold; some devising companies, far from being non-hierarchical, are director-led; and collaboration can also involve specialist roles and a formalised division of responsibilities.

In short, they conclude that devising can no longer be defined solely by distinction from scripted theatre or by commitment to democratic, inclusive or collective ways of working – because not all devising companies subscribe to these principles. Furthermore, while devising “was once [configured as] an alternative and radical form of theatre-making, [it] is now recognised as one of the major methodologies through which leading contemporary companies and practitioners create innovative work”. Indeed, the “extent of the infiltration of devising methods into mainstream professional practice is greater than we might suppose” (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 4) such that “[t]oday, devising has become a commonplace and institutionalised practice” (Heddon & Milling 2006, p. 221).

The three companies which my cases manage have similarly absorbed devising methods into the making of their theatre work. Devising has become an habitual

modus operandi – part of the habitus. So, if such processes and strategies are embedded in these organisations' *artistic* practices, to what extent might they plausibly inflect their *managers'* activities and behaviours as well?

There are other reasons for choosing the perspective of devising as a way of developing the data analysis.

First, while much of the rhetoric around cultural management focuses on the individual, the data suggests that the daily work of these cultural managers relies very heavily on collaboration and partnership, rather than singular endeavour to make or give sense of/to things. Similarly devising is more a shared process or collaborative practice and less of a singular endeavour.

So there is a parallel here that is, perhaps, interesting to explore.

Second, devising and cultural management are both written about as practices where judicious borrowing is endemic.

Cultural management is practised in a curious realm midway between artist, the arts and people, and fuelled by an extraordinary and variable span of skills, involving art and arts criticism, politics, psychology, information science economics, sociology and education (Pick & Anderton, 1996, p. 1).

...devising today encompasses a number of contexts, traditions, lineages and ideologies which have become intertwined (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 5).

the pleasure of theatre is its impurity, it's the magpie quality of people stealing from everybody else' (McBurney, 2004, p. 24, as cited in Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 24).

Mixing and matching seem to be commonplace in both, which suggests another point of contact.

Third, devising potentially offers an addition/alternative to 'the art of...' literature on improvisation and (predominantly) text-based theatre practices which – for some (this researcher included) – are difficult to use for sensemaking purposes in respect of what cultural managers do.

Fourth, precisely *because* devising is prone to unintended (or at least unconscious) mystification and hyperbole, it carries a vital analytical health

warning. I, in turn, must be wary of superficial analogy and simplistic rhetorical transfer from one field to another.

How, then, to set about this exploration?

The literature – some pieces written by practitioners; others by academic observers – tends to ‘frame’ the processes and strategies of devising in terms of phases or stages (Complicite 2001; Etchells, 1999; Frantic Assembly, 2012; Harradine & Behrndt, 2011; Heddon & Milling, 2006; Helmer & Malzacher, 2004; Govan, Nicholson & Normington, 2007; Graham & Hoggett, 2009; Mermikides & Smart, 2010).

For example, Complicite (2001) divide the process into the following elements:

- beginnings: roles within groups; the creative environment; keeping records; reading aloud as a group (to share ideas and tell stories);
- choosing a subject;
- exploring a subject;
- gathering material together;
- consolidation;
- presentation.

Almost immediately, however, there is an important caveat, in that these phases take very different forms depending on the aims/intentions, history, traditions and composition of the groups undertaking them (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 22). As a live practice, “devising...is located in time and space, and to that extent is inseparable from the contexts of its production” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 231); “method and technique arise out of and serve intention” (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 28); and a language of performance is built “that uniquely suits the actors’ particular identities, strengths and abilities” (Govan et al. 2007, p. 6). Devising is thus inextricably linked to *context*.

In another example, Smart makes use of Glass’s ‘ideal’ methodology for creative development (Glass, 2003) in her analysis of the devising processes used in Gecko’s *The Arab and the Jew* (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, pp. 165-184).

She summarises Glass’s five-stage methodology as follows (p. 170)

1. preparation;
2. creative origination;
3. creative organisation;
4. manifestation/presentation;
5. reflection and renewal.

Smart notes from her observation that these stages are not always clearly delineated and tend to overlap, looping backwards and forwards, in a manner that Glass (2003, p. 9) labels “creative cycling”. In addition, she becomes aware of a kind of “fluid simultaneity” between the different stages (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 171). In other words the process is not a straightforward, linear journey from intention to realisation.

In the section that follows, the analysis is further developed by comparing the data and pattern of doings with Glass’s five processes and strategies of devising. This method has been chosen as it has extant usage (as above) for analytical purposes, albeit in relation to theatre practice, rather than cultural management.

- ***Preparation***

Glass (2003, as summarised in Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 170) describes this first stage as “creating a safe and productive environment; preparing the bodies and minds of individuals through training and exercises; encouraging openness and receptivity in the relationship between company members”.

As Complicite note in their guide for teachers (2001), preparation is not a one-off: it “should be seen as ongoing”, though here they are referring more specifically to the development of devising *skills* though ‘provocation’; using space, games, ensemble work, movement, tension, rhythm, character creation and working from text. While the cases here did not replicate this in any literal sense, they did devote considerable time and attention – on an ongoing basis – to the development and maintenance of a fun, energetic and collaborative working environment *outside* the rehearsal space; individuals’ preparedness for the tasks in hand (both expected and unanticipated); and the quality of the interpersonal relationships inside (and outside) the company. One manager went so far as to describe her role as ‘managing the wellbeing’ of the

organisation (AU), which she regarded as having a material *and* affective dimension.

All three felt they exercised 'guardianship' of the language, mind-set and values of the company by modelling certain behaviours.

I...think in this role you do create the ethos, you create the...yeah, I don't know how to describe it. I think the kind of feel of the organisation...something to do with the culture... You do model it, don't you? How you talk and how you encourage [people]... (SS).

So, while they were very clear that they were engaged in a serious business, there was a studied informality to the way in which they operated and interacted with people.

The informality and closeness of people, that's got to be a win... (KK).

It is almost as if their ongoing shifts of register not only denoted busyness, but also mirrored and sustained this need for serious fun. So their exchanges with others could (and did) involve talking about an anticipated deficit one minute, and telling a scurrilous story (often at their own expense) the next; discussing the finer points of someone's new haircut and then slipping effortlessly into a critique of a piece of work they have recently seen; focusing on the ways in which they could do more last minute marketing for a visiting show that is not selling well enough and then immediately shifting to arranging the company Christmas walk and pub lunch. Regular recourse to storytelling and 'mucking about' was a significant 'doing', almost as if the fun element was a useful antidote to the risky, stressful and responsible parts of the job – 'every now and then I don't like the responsibility, it makes me feel quite sick' (AU).

We get to do it [laugh] most of the time. It's mostly just from stupidity but yeah, I guess we all just enjoy working together and part of that comes from having a laugh [and]...that is part of MTH, so much of what we do is about enjoyment [and ] if we didn't enjoy what we were doing, then it wouldn't come out in the work... AU)

Everyone's just so funny...it stops us getting pompous! (KK)

This echoes Frantic Assembly's observation that their "constant use of anecdotes and break-outs into story-telling ... [was] all about creating an environment of anti-pretentiousness" (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 8).

And in the same spirit, my cases' conduct of internal meetings was loose, often with last minute agendas and a relaxed approach to minutes. Despite invariably late starts, they nevertheless finished meetings on time and with agreed action points.

They also felt that the general chat at the beginning of any meeting was the most useful part. Banter and teasing preceded, interspersed and concluded the 'business'.

...the most useful bit is when we share news at the beginning...oh, that person is doing that...having a problem with that (KK)

And this frequently led to everyone (regardless of formal areas of responsibility) pitching in to try to resolve a problem or issue

Again, in an effort to sustain a supportive atmosphere, these managers were almost always interruptable and available. AU always told someone else where she was, just in case:

Hold on one second [to me]...just going to let them know that I'm here...They might need to stick their heads in any minute because I don't know if the guy who was meeting us at half nine and is now meeting us at half ten, has got the message... (AU)

All three managers projected the same sense of calm, flexibility and availability despite multiple calls on their time. This also extended to crisis or panic situations when they were clear that their role was to reassure others that it was all going to be OK and (as far as was possible) make sure it was.

My job is to say, 'Yes, it will be alright,' and 'How can we look at this?' and 'What more help do we need?' (SS).

'Loose' and 'informal' however, should not be confused with 'slack' and 'disorganised'. It was more that my cases felt that being informal and open (to ideas, interruptions etc) was an essential part of the job ("that's where the opportunities are' (KK)), and that promoting/supporting an atmosphere of serious fun was the best way of 'walking the talk'.

It was also a means of reinforcing a collaborative approach to getting things done.

I just think you are way more effective if you are cohesive when you need to be...it just needs to work as a team (KK).

This was in part pragmatic: with consistent under-staffing, people have to be able and willing to work long hours, double-up or lend a hand. It was also ideological:

The way I approach my job is ...collaborative. I think it's definitely a team effort so I think I do draw out of people what they think and what they want to do, so it's a sort of chairwoman's role... I quite like fact that I allow myself to let other people have better ideas than me. I think it's stupid not to use the best people if you've got them. (KK).

Allied to this, there was real pleasure taken in colleagues' achievements and lots of positive 'strokes' when they had done something well.

E is far brighter than I ever was but somehow, in a small way, I've been part of the psychological belief that we've created in her that she can do it, and it's fantastic, and she's only 22 years old and she is going to be awesome, isn't she? (SS).

E wants the same for MTH that I do, and actually that means I can trust that she's going to do the best she can and she'll do a really good job (AU).

In contrast to this rosy picture, there were occasional downsides, though. My cases felt that their 'giving out' role meant that they were rarely thanked or obviously appreciated – more a sense that they were where the buck stopped if things went wrong. Allied to this, unless they had a close relationship with their Chair or another colleague, they could occasionally feel isolated.

You do it for other people but nobody does it for me...[Maybe] I need a line manager and would like to have one because talking on the inside of your head is not as good as talking to somebody else (SS).

They also had difficulty with certain brands of individualism; people who 'don't get it' or who 'won't play', resulting in 'unhelpful' (as opposed to 'helpful') chaos

and a loss of trust: in other words, people whose behaviour – they felt – compromised the serious fun ethos they were at pains to uphold.

And here, I would like to introduce Fran. Fran is a fictional manager (Watson, 2000) of a micro-scale theatre organisation and the words she speaks are drawn from interview data (to preserve anonymity and respect confidentiality). Fran had difficulty in the past with a former member of staff (a music animateur) called Andy. Fran recalls that Andy didn't seem to listen:

He'd just go back to what he said at the beginning after half an hour of careful dialogue.

Fran felt real frustration when she worked with Andy because in her view he did not fully subscribe to collaborative ways of operating, i.e. he did not 'give back', share things, communicate readily, deliver what and when he said he would. Instead he would 'take other people up to the wire', which she found unacceptable. In other words, he did not prioritise the common good in the ways Fran felt *she* did. As she said:

...he just wouldn't play or produce plans. He just didn't do it, and it was the same pattern every time...his tendency was to run out of time and he hadn't made any decisions which meant that everybody he worked with just had to run behind him and nobody could question anything that he did because we were all in a panic...I always had the sense that time management was not necessarily Andy's forte and I tried to say we need to have a weekly...meeting, but then when he was really busy, he was, like, "We haven't got the time..." It's like, well, actually, he really needed to make that time commitment... You see, much as I like the flexibility of my job and how great it is that we can have our own work, I just think it needs to be *this organisation* that we're driving, whereas Andy was just doing his own thing. He didn't understand how to give value back; he didn't give us anything... [I just thought] you are not *with* us.

Fran tried to address the situation with Andy. Sometimes this involved a direct offer of help.

It's like if I did something to start it off [e.g. draft a schedule] then he would go "Oh no, that shouldn't be in that week, it should be in that week, and it will take that many days".



Or she offered to talk the difficulty through with him to encourage a change in behaviour:

I tried to sort of big up his role ...so we were equals so therefore I needed some support from him...but it didn't work, really... To be honest, he didn't want me to sit down with him even though I did offer that a number of times.

More generally, Fran found it most difficult to ally her preference for everyone to 'get on' (in a fairly flat hierarchy) with the need – occasionally - to challenge 'difficult' behaviour in others.

Why would you have a massive blow-up if it meant you didn't have any degree of friendship left..? It was easier to keep him happy...and if I'd stamped my feet and stuff...we wouldn't have been able to pick up the phone [after he took up a composer-in-residence post elsewhere] to ask for his help on things and now we can.

Fran reflected more generally:

Sometimes, perhaps too much, my leadership is too much from the back... Someone once told me about those cards you can use, that coaching exercise where one is a warrior, one's a lover, one's something else – I imagine I would play the lover card too often and perhaps sometimes I *could* play the warrior...I can really see the situation where trying to reach a cooperative kind of place isn't the best way to go!

Overall – and reverting back to KK, SS and AU – I observed my cases doing a lot of watching and fielding, mainly in respect of *people*, both within and outside the organisation, strongly underpinned by an experiential understanding of working with artists.

In interview, KK recounted a story she had heard during a presentation given by Charles Leadbeater (writer on innovation and creativity) in 2005. The title was Forget Jack Welch: Jimmy Wales is the future, and in her view, it perfectly encapsulated the people (and especially artist) management aspect of a producer or cultural manager's role.

Most traditional senior managers...think they are in the propulsion business: it is their job to propel their organisation on, drive it forward.

Senior managers arrive at their offices early in the morning, ready to pick up the organisation as if it were a rock and throw it forward, to get it from A to B. This is what they earn their bonuses doing: rock throwing.

But instead imagine your task is to get a bird from point A to point B. If you have spent too much time with the wrong management consultants you will know the solution is to strap up the bird's wings, attach a rock to the bottom and throw it. The bird is likely to die in the process and has been robbed of all birdlike properties but at least it gets to its destination.

Now imagine your task is to get a flock of birds from point A to point B. That flock includes your staff, customers, suppliers, shareholders, partners, even some of your competitors. You do not have enough hands and rocks to propel them all. The only way to get them to point B is to attract them by putting out bird-seed and water at point B (Leadbeater, 2005b).

### ***Creative origination***

For Glass (2003) this second stage is where ideas for a performance piece are elicited, generated, explored and developed in practice. Smart adds (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 173), that this is also a “time to ask questions ...to open up the potential scope of a project...”

One of the myths of devising is that the process begins with nothing at all and ideas emerge from thin air.

Frantic Assembly assert that:

This is not the case. It may take years for an idea to get into the rehearsal room and before it does it has been batted back and forth between the directors, reshaped and presented to producers and other collaborators (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 5).

They maintain they always begin with a notion, a kernel of an idea, something they want to explore further in terms of form and content, composition and performance.

Furthermore:

Many devising companies have an area of interest to which they return repeatedly, producing a kind of ‘family relationship’ between their different

shows. Very often shows arise out of previous projects (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 22).

And at the same time

Despite never going into a rehearsal room without some form of solid intention, a significant part of devising is to *not know*. We do not walk into rehearsals on day one clutching a big black notebook full of all the answers (Graham & Hoggett, p. 7, italics added).

The important thing is that material emerges from and during the process. As Mermikides and Smart conclude from their observations of eight theatre companies that make devising-based performances (2010, p. 23):

Even when [companies are] working from an existing story which prescribes essential elements...the absence of a script in the early stages of the process leaves plenty of room for experimenting with *how* the story will be told (italics in original).

This combination of a notion or intention or existing story and yet 'not knowing' was very clearly echoed in these managers' doings, mind-set and disposition, with 'material' emerging during (in some instances quite lengthy) periods of exploration and development. This is illustrated most obviously in the following three cases-within-cases.

A main focus for KK during observation was the planning, funding and resourcing of a three month period of organisational development (January – March 2012) to enable the team to 'get under the skin of what THB is, should be and could be'; consult on and update the 2008 Theatre Live Discussion Paper; 'write a bunch of policies and update our business plan'; and be 'NPO-ready' by the end of it.

I observed the progression of these concerns over the course of three meetings.

The first was an impromptu and exploratory conversation between KK and one of her producer colleagues. I was told that this was quite a common and reciprocal occurrence; something they referred to as 'producing each other': shorthand for trying things out, asking questions, and supporting the other in finding a way forward.

We spend a lot of time talking to other people and just asking them questions and being a sounding board, but we need that [too]...you need someone to help you work out how you can make that happen. Someone to interrogate your idea and then figure out the strategy for taking it forward... that's what you want; you want that bounced back (KK).

At one point – following on from an earlier discussion about the role of the producer – KK suggested 'let's think of it [the project] as producing a show'. This resulted in a number of questions which they used for a while to frame the discussion:

How does one devise a show? What is story we want to tell? What is our connection with the story we want to tell? How will we tell it? Who is it for and how will people engage with it? What is the practice/ how will we do it?

There was a playful element to this exercise, with no pressure for it to result in a tangible outcome.

We might not get a show, but we have to go with it and see where we end up (KK).

They talked through and jumped between the major themes of the project ('we can put everything we want now and then make it more sensible later' (KK)), slipping in and out of matters of principle, practicalities, success measures, timetabling ('Let's plan for two months and call it three'), costs, external people they might involve and break outs for storytelling (ASDA, KK's father-in-law and his views on jargon, even what it takes to be a good arts manager: 'integrity: giving a shit'). KK concluded the meeting with: 'I feel so much better about this now'.

The second meeting was with the THB board. KK had prepared a draft bid for project funding from Arts Council England and having presented it as an agenda item, she asked for feedback: 'Your thoughts would be very welcome'. There was plenty of informal discussion and lots of questioning: 'If I was the Arts Council, I'd be wondering about how you could do Open Space with only four people?' KK mainly listened and then fed back.

I don't talk as much when the ideas are coming in, but I do summarise and add an input, yes (KK)

Again the discussion moved seamlessly from the theoretical to the pragmatic and from the procedural to the ribald. Towards the end, a board member offered to come in 'and ask really horrible, difficult questions' when the next iteration of the bid was ready.

The third meeting involved KK and two colleagues (TA and SKi). It was in three parts spread over one day and involved a return train journey from Bristol to Exeter (for a lunchtime meeting at the regional offices of Arts Council England).

At this point the funding bid had been submitted and a decision was imminent. An agreement had been made to cover KK's maternity leave by increasing/extending the existing contract of a THB associate producer (KD) and negotiating the part-time secondment of another creative producer (CRD) from a different Bristol-based theatre organisation. KK had drawn up the provisional schedule for the period of organisational development January – March 2012; a very clear and organised document, in tabular form.

KK offered agenda items for each leg of the journey (handwritten in her A4 notebook) and once again the discussion moved in and out of different topics and registers, with KK listening, prompting with questions: 'What are we going to pay CRD? Shall we decide that now? We could pitch something and see what she says?' and testing suggestions for principled robustness: 'We need to do the best thing by her' and 'I think we need to be upfront if there's lots of boring shit to do'.

At the start of the return journey KK summarised the outward discussion, adding to and slightly adjusting 'the story' as she recounted it.

...I think that partly just the effort of summarising makes your brain work so therefore you have a few baubles... and it's a way of checking their understanding... sometimes I'm quite good at putting a gloss on something or changing it quite a bit! (KK).

Once again the conversation moved in, around and away from the 'designated' topics, encompassing both professional and personal concerns and anecdotes.

The third leg of the meeting took place back at the office (at the end of the same day) – 'scientific this process, eh?' (KK) – with KK once again 'summarising' the discussions that had already taken place and testing the resultant ideas out with two further colleagues. Part way through, KK ascertained that the bid had been

successful, which prompted huge relief, much celebration and a new thought: 'We're never going to be in this position again with these two great people [KD and CRD]. Why don't we get them planning and developing stuff rather than just delivering?' Even at this stage, the way forward was still evolving loosely and iteratively, still in the process of 'becoming' ('Let's have a look at our own lists and include things we never have the chance to do'), involving lots of input from others in various configurations and *just enough* structure to get the job done. When KK and I discussed this way of working, she described it as 'very producery'.

My approach is always to go, right, this is what we need to work out and I don't know the end point...I don't have the answers and I do kind of use people a lot, but I think you get their buy-in then forever (KK).

She then allied this to the organisation as a whole:

...we concluded that our role really was to hold uncertainty...Perhaps that's one of the things that THB does do a bit of, it's sort of being in the middle, the thinking space in the middle of the city that can go "Hang on, don't know. Let's look at it" (KK).

THB's ways of generating and exploring ideas were similarly reflected in the activities and behaviours of the remaining two cases, particularly (though not exclusively) in respect of major organisational issues and initiatives.

A principal concern for SS during the observation period was the future of a number of BTH's activity strands in straitened economic circumstances; budgeting and fundraising for 2011/12 and 2012/13; and a prospective capital bid.

A significant preoccupation for AU was the forthcoming touring production of Tin (in collaboration with English Touring Opera). In addition, she was preparing for the renovation of the company's new production centre.

Here, both managers were again working with solid intentions: the future sustainability of BTH had to be secured without compromising the organisation's integrity; the Tin co-production and tour had to be successful artistically, financially and in terms of MTH's reputation, and the refurbishment

had to provide accommodation that would work for multiple interests and activities.

The 'how' though, evolved loosely, collaboratively and iteratively over time, through numerous formal and informal meetings, discussions and impromptu chats, with the managers spending a lot of time asking questions, keeping the momentum going and adding information when useful (keeping things "moving, playful and nimble" (Etchells, 1999, p, 53), all documented in their ubiquitous A4 notebooks. They sustained both a clear intention *and* 'not knowing' (keeping things open for as long as possible) over several weeks, with ideas changing and developing with each telling, discussion and group of people.

Probably we go more round the houses than we really need to but that's just the people involved and everyone gets excited about ideas and just need to scope out all the options before we can work out the best...so sometimes I feel like we go into these conversations without a clear enough idea of what we want or what we need but actually, I think when you're working on a limited budget, when you are working with a small group, you actually need to scope out who can bring what to the table and then almost then react to that as opposed to going in there and going "We've got to do it like this, and this, and this"...It's actually knowing that you've suddenly got someone who has got skills that you know you can work with and working out how you can make the most of utilising them (AU).

This is reminiscent of Frantic Assembly's description of their rehearsal process as "playing about with 'what if?'" (2012, p. 16):

We initially create the kernel of an idea and test this to see if it is interesting enough and that 'it has got legs' – whether it will stand up to scrutiny and be interesting to anyone else. This 'testing' is pretty much talking about the idea, letting it sit for a while and then returning to it with a wiser head to see if it still excites us.

They add (providing an unconscious link back to sensemaking):

It is only when we respond to...questions that we get to consider what our opinions are...questions are our opportunity to take stock reflect and sound like we know what we are talking about (p. 15).

This, in turn, reflects observations by AU, SS and KK:

...I am the one who does the questioning, the checking...whether it's of a number of routes, is this the right route? Are we sure we have checked? Are we sure we have covered the territory? Is there another way of doing this...? (SS).

...I think it is really useful when someone says to you, 'Why?' Because people do it to me, or E's done it to me, it's a most useful question in that process ... (AU).

So just as you think you are on a roll, you do have to keep going, what's it for? Who's doing it? Why? What can we do? (KK).

Similarly, and as is implicit in the above descriptions, all three cases showed inflections of other devising techniques associated with creative origination: a degree of play, borrowing (from other people and their work), and deliberate use of limitations or 'rules'.

Mermikides and Smart see play as:

Both the willingness to improvise around ideas and the degree of strategic flexibility purposefully left within the process, with many companies delaying fixing their pieces until a very late stage, a strategy common to companies with quite different stylistic traditions (2010, p. 23).

My cases certainly recognised the serious importance of improvisation or "messaging about" (Etchells, 1999, p. 52) and derived considerable pleasure from the ridiculous, in which they actively engaged. They were acutely aware of their responsibility to turn a doodle into a recognisable drawing *at some point* (otherwise the funding bid would not get in on time, the show would not be ready to open by the designated date; the work would not reach the right audience), but they were also clear that it must not happen *too soon*.

They were also inveterate borrowers of other people's sayings and doings, which they used to inform and enhance their own work. For example, KK became a devotee of Michael Kaiser's model of fundraising (after attending a seminar) and from this she and her colleagues extrapolated a THB approach; SS professed to have learnt all she knew about arts management by copying the behaviours of her two predecessors (a form of borrowing much used by



cultural managers); and AU consciously adopted her artistic director's description of 'enjoyment' to underpin her approach to managing the company. There was no sense of under-the-counter appropriation here: once again, this was part of the prevailing mind-set and disposition; it was normal.

Their use of limitations was interesting, and subtly different from the way the strategy is used in much devising.

Aside from the example of KK's playful recourse to 'producing a show' as a temporary framework for discussion (see above), limitations for my cases tended to be related to time and resources, in the spirit of making the best of a bad job or "endless making do" (Etchells, 1999, p. 23).

...we're quite good at...going, right, we have got this problem, let's look at it now...or if we don't have time, we will have to do it within that hour. So yeah, everybody is quite good at that, I think (KK).

There was also a sense of stretching boundaries or limits set by others. For example, all were in the process of finalising their KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) as part of their transition to Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations. All were equally willing to 'blag it', by which they meant adhering to the requirement *and* ensuring that the substance of the KPIs did not overly or adversely affect the company's work.

Let's just stick to what we do (AU).

The trustees said to me, make sure your [KPI] baselines are really low! [SS].

There was also a very revealing instance of a particular kind of limitation actively *impeding* a process of creative origination.

The meeting at the Arts Council – the purpose of the train journey undertaken by KK and two of her THB colleagues – was also attended by representatives of the other South West theatre development agencies, all of whom wanted to scope out funding possibilities for their combined website. At the start, one of the two ACE officers hosting the meeting said:

Can we begin by establishing the purpose of this meeting and what we want to get from it?

To which one of the THB members replied:

We have the idea of a new web entity, 'danceandtheatre.net', and we want to see how we can move forward on it.

The ACE representative continued:

Well, perhaps it would be a good idea to begin by updating you all on the current situation at ACE.

The discussion then concentrated on the obstacles to ACE funding such a development (How could it be classified as a project? Where is the demand? What is the business case?) and the problem of National Portfolio Organisations (which they all were) not being eligible to apply through Grants for the Arts or being major beneficiaries of such a bid.

Despite the efforts of those present (Arts Council *and* agency representatives) to find ways round these difficulties (e.g. 'Two thousand people in the region will be the beneficiaries, not us') there was a sense of stalemate, at the end of what was a fairly flat and mutually defensive encounter.

This exchange was particularly interesting because it ran counter to the ways in which I saw the cases operating habitually in their own organisations (unless swift and decisive action had to be taken). While the agency representatives wanted to start with 'what if...' and to talk around the possibilities of the *idea* (i.e. what the 'clothes' might look like), the Arts Council officers felt obliged to start by establishing parameters for the discussion and foregrounding restrictions on funding (i.e. what 'cloth' was available). In other words, the former were orientated to 'talk the walk'; while the latter felt obliged to 'walk the talk', with a resulting mismatch between them. While this could be dismissed in stereotypical terms as the agencies being naive (or disingenuous) and the Arts Council being defensive and controlling, it did serve to underline that, as with devising, so with aspects of cultural management: 'clothes' tend to precede 'cloth' at the creative origination stage, "method and technique arise out of and serve intention...and context is everything" (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 28).

- ***Creative organisation***

Glass (2003) regards this third phase as being about focus and structure; drawing ideas together and developing the overall meaning of the project, with the emphasis on "the creation of connections, relationships [and]...priorities" (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 76). He stresses the symbiotic relationship

between creative origination and organisation – “We can think of them as two sides of one stage that acts as the centre of creative practice” (Glass, 2003, p.7) – so generating and organising material are modes of thinking that are often simultaneous and indistinct (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 25).

Furthermore, “the specific techniques and structures used to edit, shape and structure ideas into a performance...depend to a large extent of the style of work [a company] is involved in...[and bring] into sharp focus the question of collaborative methodology” (pp. 25-26) so this is far from a standard recipe.

Etchells (1999, pp. 52-53) likens this phase to playing “Nice Cop/Nasty Cop” where a few days’ improvisation and play would then be scrutinised and interrogated, before going back to playing again “which seemed a good way of teasing stuff from the unconscious and working on it”(p. 53). He sees a certain lightness in playing the nasty cop:

...bringing down a conceptual grid or frame onto what they were doing, but then to take it off again and replace it with another one...at best [being] speculative and pragmatic...they were only interested in ‘what worked’ (...for them, in this place in history, culture and time) (p. 53).

Etchells argues that this kind of non-linear, iterative process helps differentiate between “arriving at a decision” and “making a decision”, between “coming to a decision and forcing one” (p. 53.). He describes the former (and for Forced Entertainment, preferable) approaches as “meandering (with a strange certainty that you dare not trust) towards things the things they needed but could not name in advance” (p. 53).

And importantly:

Nothing should be finished too hastily; fragments remaining fluid for a long time, to be tested in diverse combinations (Helmer & Malzacher, 2004, p. 16)

This kind of slow, slow, quick, quick, slow movement towards a decision, an art work, a performance, connects with my cases in two ways.

First, these managers are habituated to this kind of rhythm and process: they are used to the non-linear, stop-start, meandering ways in which devised (or devising-inflected) theatre work develops. They are aware that “[h]alf of your ideas will not have come to fruition halfway through the rehearsals and it is

unlikely that in the third week of a four week rehearsal schedule you will be sat on 75 percent of the finished product” (Frantic Assembly, 2012, p. 6-7), because that is how things are when their company or their associates make work.

Often, they themselves may be in the position of not knowing exactly what the show is, at the point at which they have to buy, sell or promote it; they have to hold their own nerve during this period as well as helping others hold theirs (nice cop); and they have enough direct experience of the satisfaction of arriving at “something beyond the artistic expectations of the rehearsal process” (p. 7) to trust it.

Second, some of the techniques and rhetoric of the creative organisation phase are echoed or paralleled in their management work.

To go back to the cases-within-cases, the process of putting together a production and tour; constructing a financial development plan and capital bid; shaping up and resourcing a period of organisational development involved the managers in instances of busy, focused, collaborative work and periods when ideas were left to ‘cook’, largely because other things needed to be attended to. They then re-visited and re-worked them – invariably with others – before putting them back in the oven again.

While these pieces of work did not involve the presentation of work-in-progress (a common feature of devising) in the theatre sense, they did use material gathered in their A4 notebooks to help them write draft documents, proposals, timelines and bids along the way, as a way of articulating things to others, getting the benefit of an outside eye, testing for robustness, and inculcating a sense of shared ownership of the result. This often involved getting other colleagues to write sections (based on their areas of responsibility or expertise) which the manager would then shape, edit and incorporate into the whole.

I’m going to put B [the Artistic Director] on it for 24 hours and then I’ll put it in the right shape... We work quite well like that (AU).

Sometimes it seemed like the finished plan or document would contain such a mix of input that it became difficult to remember who had done what.

...you can’t really pinpoint who said what, who agreed, whose idea it was, which is really nice, I think. It feels like a team effort (KK).

Here again is something that is reminiscent of what some practitioners say about devising.

Our favourite devising processes are the ones where the lines of creativity start to blur...when it is not possible to remember who thought of what or whether the words or the music came first...where the creative team act as one unit, sitting in front of the same scene or image or moment and all feeding into the process not just as, say, lighting designer but as a potential audience member and a Frantic theatre maker (Frantic Assembly, 2012, p. 8).

And there are attendant issues here about authorial voice and what that might mean within the context of a collaborative process.

Tim Etchells, the artistic director [of Forced Entertainment] consistently rejects the concept of an authorial voice in his work, arguing that writing for performance is often about “collecting, sifting and using bits of other people’s stuff” rather than an expression of a coherent voice or “self” (Govan et al., 2007, p. 6).

One again I am not suggesting any kind of direct equivalence here, nor am I taking what Etchells, Frantic Assembly or indeed KK say as ‘read’. What is particularly interesting is the notion of a shared rhetoric, disposition or mind-set within organisations of this type which infuses (and is perhaps even embodied) in the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of their cultural managers’ work, something that remains unexplored in the literature on devising, producing or cultural management.

This notion becomes particularly pertinent when considering another common myth of devising, namely the belief that ‘intuition’ is the best test that something is going to work.

As Heddon and Milling (2006, p. 10) attest:

... that moment of intuitive recognition in a group, as a group, is a function of the establishment of a shared set of patterns and experience, and thus is a recognition of what is the same, rather than what is original, and is part of what an audience can then recognise as a style of work.

It may be no coincidence, then, that my cases invariably appraised particularly energetic meetings where they had encountered 'new' and breakthrough/ productive ways forward with the words:

I feel so much better about this now (KK).

This is actually brilliant – a great shaft of light... Well, that's cheered me up no end (SS).

Or conversely:

It's not feeling right, so let's deal with it now (AU).

- ***Manifestation***

For Glass (2003) this fourth stage is the performance of the creative project.

Practitioners repeatedly claim that a devised work is never finished and this proved to be the case with the companies observed... Evolution and development continue through the run of performances with quite substantial changes sometimes being made... (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 27).

As Smart notes (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 181):

For David Glass a defining characteristic of this stage is the shifting of focus from 'inward' to 'outward' ..., from the performers' private journey of exploration to their encounter with an audience

Frantic Assembly are more emphatic:

There are those artists who will argue that the value of process is as important, if not more so than, the value of the result. This line of thinking seems to forget that the main point of creativity in theatre is about the end point, the public event. At this moment of presentation what is crucial is the result...Ultimately we firmly support the audience member's right to pay for product over process. (Frantic Assembly, 2012, p. 6).

For the cultural managers, this 'shift' stage was where they had most direct input – where their 'guardianship' of the organisation's work, values and reputation and their judgement – carried significant influence and weight.

SS described the first time BTH co-produced a Christmas show with devising company Le Navet Bête. The resulting piece transformed the Nativity into a

'magic roller coaster donkey ride of clowning, live music and general tomfoolery, with all your favourite Nativity characters (Mary, Joseph, Gabriel), plus some you didn't know were there (Engelbert Humperdinck, some extra sheep)'. When it came to a title, the favoured option was Bethlehem. SS felt that this did not properly encapsulate the piece and could potentially mislead audiences into thinking that this was a faithful rendition of the Nativity, when it was anything but. So – after much debate – the title was changed to The Greatest Story...Never Told, helping to ensure a much more accurate 'fit' and – after a sell-out run – an enhanced, rather than compromised reputation for BTH.

AU – who goes into rehearsals about three times a week during production periods – spoke about how she leaves people to get on with it, unless she spots something that might be problematic for the show's target audience.

I've probably got a lot more confidence to say, that scene doesn't work...I guess I am always probably thinking of it from the audience's point of view, so it was back in the first scene, I was, like, you don't really need to have that in there, and it was all innuendos, way over the top, and we'd have teachers complaining ... [sometimes] adults will get something that children don't and adults think it's not suitable. And so for me, I go, like, this is opening the show. If that was the reaction that you got to x and y, actually unless you really need it for the story or it's really intrinsic to the show, I don't think it needs to potentially set everybody off on the wrong footing. And actually in the end of the day it just didn't need it, so... (AU).

She also gives feedback during the run as she tends to see more performances than the director (she often runs the box office and helps with front-of house).

I realised I am a MTH audience member as well as being manager of the company... On Sherlock Holmes... [when] I was there so much, I saw the audience reaction...I knew that in the first half...the pace could have been better, we could have got people sucked in a lot quicker...they weren't necessarily hooked as much as they should have been...when you see something five nights in a row, you really see it... [and] now I have seen so much of it, that I just kind of want it to be...to keep tweaking it to make it better and better all the time (AU).

The market for THB's work is principally artists (performers, writers, directors, producers, companies) so while they do not deal directly with 'audience' in the conventional sense, they spend a lot of time ensuring the best possible connection between their 'product' (support, help, advice) and their users. When KK is working with practitioners, her role often becomes that of critical friend – both during the creative organisation and manifestation phases.

I guess my plan is always to have a good enough relationship with people so that I can give them feedback and actually people who are rubbish don't care. I don't really need to do much about those people. The people who I think have got potential...I do need to check in with them that they know that a piece of work was bad. As long as I know that they know, it's fine and we can think about how they could help themselves to make the next thing better or to make that thing better. So many people are quite open to getting feedback (KK).

This interplay with the creative work also raises interesting issues about power and authority.

...my kind of producer always treats the artists as the leader, they are the boss...realising their vision is a lot of it, but in my little talk the other day [KK had given a conference presentation about the role of the producer] one of my top tips was, know what you serve, and I think I serve the artists' vision. So they're in charge but I'm pushing it, I'm making it happen, so I'm in charge of, where does it fit? Who should it go to? What's the point of it all? How can we make it better? And all those things I'm in charge of....back-up and challenge (KK).

This adds a further dimension to the amount of time the cases spent ensuring their own and their colleagues' 'performance readiness' in advance of important meetings and presentations. I use the term, not to overly stretch the analogy, but because two of my managers, KK (who still works part-time as a creative producer) and SS (a former drama teacher, director and performer) explicitly referred to this process as 'rehearsing' or 'practising'.

I think it is a sort of rehearsal so that you are in the moment, you know? Just a warm-up so that we are better in this meeting than going, oh, what? (KK).



[To a colleague about a forthcoming meeting]... we don't need to practice that, do we? (KK).

As set out in the thick descriptions at the start, 'practising' included SS running through a marketing presentation with a colleague who was going to deliver it at a difficult meeting ('...we do need to explain to the whole company what we are doing and where the priorities are, and enable the whole company to own, as I've been saying to everybody individually, we are all marketing and communications'); KK coaching a colleague prior to a meeting with an Arts Council Officer ('I didn't want her to be pitch perfect...but I did want her to own it...I really wanted A to understand her value, see how good she is') and AU and her Chair going through all the agenda items for a board meeting to make sure each knew what the other was going to say, and reworking their inputs along the way.

- ***Reflection and renewal***

This fifth and final stage, according to Glass (2003), enables participants to consider critically what they have achieved, receive feedback and set new goals for future development.

Mermikides and Smart (2010, p. 27) assert that ongoing development means that reflection is ongoing too. It is

...an essential element of every stage of the process: all the companies [featured] constantly discuss[ed] creative decisions about the project in hand ... [which included] consideration of each company's...techniques, strategies and approaches to process.

The cases here instigated and participated in formal points of reflection e.g. a post-mortem on co-productions at the Edinburgh Festival; evaluations/wash-ups at the end of every production; reflections on artist support initiatives. Company meetings involved lots of check and challenge in respect of ongoing activities. And in day to day conversation, there was continual articulation and revision of emerging thoughts and plans. Talking things through was a red thread through all and every activity: how do we know what we think until we see what we say? How do we know what we're doing until we've seen what we've done?

As noted, however, the emphasis for these managers was in facilitating *others'* reflections, and they felt that their busyness did not always afford them the

same opportunity. While occasions for reflecting *in* their work were there in abundance; chances to reflect *on* it was in much shorter supply – unless, like KK (and latterly AU), they had a close colleague with whom they could do this on a reciprocal basis. Their willing engagement in this research was testament to their interest in discovering more about what they do, through talk with an ‘other’.

The iterative development of company work is also emphasised at this stage in the process:

Each production raises issues and questions which feed into the next...highlight[ing] the important fact that ideas can take time to mature or to find their place within a company’s ongoing development of themes and concerns (Mermikides & Smart, 2010, p. 23).

It is also considered essential to try and avoid the ‘straightjacket’ of any particular style or methodology so as to be able to respond flexibly to new projects and ideas.

While not exactly replicated in these managers’ doings, these elements were nevertheless echoed with respect to company development *as a whole*. Form followed substance (different clothes required different types of cloth and dressmaking techniques) and managerial ways of doing things also evolved over time, in iterative rather than linear fashion.

Even though the cases’ jobs required them to take responsibility for writing and submitting project and end-of-year evaluations to funders, their main interest and motivation was much more future-orientated: it was the potential of the next thing that was most exciting, not dwelling overmuch on the past.

We have an important philosophy in the rehearsal room and beyond that with everything we do – we should always be moving forward and not spend too much valuable time looking back! (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 11).

And finally, of particular resonance is the observation that (in respect of Frantic Assembly’s work):

...we have always been of the mind that an essential form of development is the next production. We really do not know what we have learnt from the

last production until we are under the pressure of making the next one (p. 5).

Sensemaking, it would seem, remains the unacknowledged spectre at the feast. What this fourth and final thematic strand seems to suggest as *plausible* is that the 'what' and 'how 'of my cases' doings have a strong resonance with processes and strategies of devising for theatre, an established *modus operandi* for each of these companies when making work. Aspects of the shuttling, shifting and both/and-ness of devising have distinct parallels with the pattern of doings identified earlier e.g. taking quick decisive action *and* engaging in slower, collaborative ongoing and iterative working out of ways forward; collecting/editing/making stories *and* disseminating them; holding the big picture *and* focussing on the detail; dividing time between practising *and* presenting; direction giving *and* non-directive coaching and facilitating; being orientated towards product *and* audience.

To be clear, however, this is not to assert that what these cultural managers do *is* devising (they are not directly making performance work), or that it is *like* devising (implying a metaphorical connection between two completely dissimilar fields). What is explored here is the possibility of absorption, embodiment (of tropes, ideologies, processes and strategies), recreation and reflection (in behaviours, sayings and doings) in these managers' day to day activity.

#### **Conclusion to Chapter 4**

This analysis chapter began with *thick description* of a day in the life of the three cultural managers who comprised my case studies. This was followed by a *pattern of doings* derived from the data as a whole, and depicted as four interdependent polarities or continua between or along which all three cases seemed to shift and shuttle in their day-to-day activities. These were: individual/collective; inside/outside; means/ends and tight/loose. This pattern was then compared, contrasted and further explored using four thematic strands drawn from the literature, whilst – at the same time – remaining close to the data.

The first thematic strand, compared the data with the results of Mintzberg's (1973) study ('What do managers do?') and work by Helgesen (1990, 1995),

who drew on Mintzberg's research in her own studies of women managers (these cases being likewise all female). Like Mintzberg's managers, they engaged in open-ended and fairly constant activity, characterized by brevity, variety and fragmentation. They preferred to be doing things, made constant use of verbal media, developed and maintained a rich network of contacts, and worked to a mixture of rights and duties (with the emphasis more on the latter than the former).

Unlike Mintzberg's men and like Helgesen's women, however, they moved at a steady pace through their day, presenting as calm (not "relentless") in their demeanour. Rather than snatching opportunities to deal with mail/emails and phone calls, they tended to set aside chunks of time to do it. They saw dealing with interruptions and maintaining open access as vital rather than distracting and essential for building good working relationships both within and outside their organisation. They saw themselves as future-orientated, in contrast to Mintzberg's managers whose (observed) daily activities focused almost entirely on the immediate and short-term. Rather than playing roles, the cases described exercising different facets of their personality according to the circumstances. In addition, they spoke of themselves with pronounced irony and professed a marked disregard for their future career trajectory. Although they habitually worked more than their contracted hours, they all made time for outside interests and responsibilities which helped them switch off. Finally, there was a dynamic quality to their information-sharing (or transmitting), which contrasted with Mintzberg's more static 'neck in the hourglass' metaphor.

The first thematic strand serves a 'grounding' function for this study (which is why it has been summarised in more detail than the remaining three strands). It provides an important reminder that 'what cultural managers do' may in several respects be similar to managers in other sectors (constant, fragmented activity; a preference for verbal media; keenness to network), and that a gender variable is an important consideration in analysing what these cultural managers do and how they do it (which Helgesen summarises as calmness, positive attitude to interruptions and ongoing availability, habitual information sharing, and a certain detachment from the job).

The second thematic strand compared the data to the dimensions and categories suggested by existing empirical research in the cultural management

field. Once again there were points in common with the beliefs, views and experiences expressed by these cultural managers: the comparative invisibility of their roles within and often outside their organisations; the importance of informality in their professional relationships, working styles, learning methods and career development; and the unshakeable commitment they felt towards their artists/colleagues and the artistic output of their organisations. It is also important to note that while each case articulated a very strong sense of purpose for their role and organisation, they were less able to give a coherent description of what they do and offered little insight into how they do it (aside from informally, collaboratively and busily). While they clearly reflected *in* their job, they seemed to spend much less time reflecting *on* it. This applied particularly to the possibility of an isomorphic connection between what they did in and from the office and what their artist colleagues did in and from the rehearsal and performance space.

The third thematic strand considered the data alongside a sensemaking perspective, drawing on the seven 'properties' of identity construction, retrospect, enactment, social resources, updating of ongoing impressions, cue utilization, and plausibility rather than accuracy. This gave further texture and nuance to the cases' shifting and shuttling between different topics and registers, and the ways in which they made things happen. More than this, however, there was resonance with Weick and Sutcliffe's "high reliability organising". The cases saw themselves operating in circumstances of ongoing uncertainty and insecurity, analogous to the "continuously trying conditions" experienced by HROs. In addition they could be seen to exercise the five capabilities deployed to address such conditions: tracking small failures; resisting simplification; being sensitive to operations; maintaining capabilities for resilience; and taking advantage of shifting locations of expertise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). There were discernible differences, however, in the cases' attitudes and behaviour towards the 'unexpected'; the degree of collaborative problem-solving; and issues around improvisation (within the context of 'the art of...').

The fourth analytical strand looked at the data through the processes and strategies of devising for theatre, drawing comparisons with Glass's (2003) five stage, cyclical methodology: preparation, creative origination, creative

organisation, manifestation/presentation, reflection/renewal. Analysis here suggests that proximity to these processes (and the artists who enact them) seemed to influence the *ways* in which these managers negotiated interdependent polarities and engaged in high reliability organising. Rather than operating apart from or merely servicing the creative practices or ethos of their organisations, all three showed instances of active embodiment of them in the *manner* of their doings. This strand brought issues of isomorphism back into play.

Each of these four thematic strands provides a different angle on the data, and reflects both extant and new perspectives on what cultural managers do. Importantly, however, and as implied in the preceding pages, there are also patterns that recur *across* them. Both warp *and* weft are key to making sense of the data, addressing the research questions, and constructing an interesting, holistic and plausible conceptual insight. This chapter has explored issues of warp. The weft and the intricacy of the whole weave provide the focus for the discussion that follows.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

## Introduction

In theorizing from process data, we should not have to be shy about mobilizing both inductive (data-driven) approaches and deductive (theory-driven) approaches iteratively or simultaneously as inspiration guides us. There is room not only for building on existing constructs to develop new relationships (Eisenhardt, 1989) but for designing process research that selectively takes concepts from different theoretical traditions and adapts them to the data in hand, or takes ideas from the data and attaches them to theoretical perspectives, enriching those theories as it goes along... Sensemaking is the objective (Langley, 1999, p. 708).

The purpose of this chapter is to arrive at an “interesting” (Davis, 1971), “surprising” (Mintzberg, 2005), “accurate, parsimonious, general and useful” (Weick, 1989) and, hopefully, perception-changing theoretical contribution, which sheds new light on ‘what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations’. In short, this is the story about how it all fits together, what it means, and why anyone else should sit up and take notice of it.

The analysis chapter explored and presented the data through four thematic strands, experimenting with different underlying mechanisms (or sensitising devices) and enfolding associated literature (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 544) as it proceeded. So theorising had already begun.

Here, the weaving across those four strands (the weft) is enacted through discussion of a number of propositions about ‘what cultural managers do’. An abductive mode comes to the fore here with a particular emphasis on “the conjectural and suppositional in the theorizing process...provoking [the researcher] to see and form new ideas” (Locke, Golden-Biddle & Feldman, 2008, p. 908). By these means, the warp and weft are woven together into a “statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and why [this] phenomenon occurs” (Corley & Gioia, 2011, p. 12), i.e. a plausible, holographic theoretical insight.

## 5.1 The propositions

There are nine propositions in all, with each addressing a different aspect of what cultural managers do, how and why. They are discussed in turn.

### ***1. Cultural managers in micro-scale theatre companies make particular kinds of theatre-based work happen with/for particular constituencies, and seek to ensure a sustainable future for their company and/or art form***

This is an overarching or first level proposition distilled from what the cases articulated as the *purpose* of their work within their organisations. This is their function as they see it: making things of particular value happen in good company *and* – as set out in the literature review – pulling “things together and along in a general direction to bring about long-term organisational [and here, art form] survival” (Watson, 1986, as cited in Watson, 2001, p. 33).

Managing in the cultural industries is... about creating and maintaining an organization that can produce and sell meaning (Lawrence & Phillips, 2002, p. 431).

The cases were very clear about this dual aspect, even if it was not properly or fully reflected in their job descriptions or others’ assessment of their role. Nevertheless, writ large, this is what they do, in very close relationship with others, with a very high level of commitment, motivation – even vocation.

As noted earlier, even if (as Mintzberg and others have demonstrated) managers rarely exhibit the kind of behaviours associated with ‘classical’ notions of management (i.e. that they simply ‘do’ planning, coordinating etc.), it is still the case that making stuff happen and seeking to ensure a sustainable future are crucially dependent on some level of planning and coordinating, not least to satisfy “the requirements of all those parties who must supply the organisation with resources to enable it to continue in existence” (Watson, 2001, p. 33). This is certainly the case for these managers. The problem is that the link between function and activities is not always easy to see, track or articulate.

While this study has focused explicitly on activities, it is impossible, fully to disaggregate them from function (and associated sub-functions). Indeed, this



enquiry has inevitably wandered in to the 'missing middle' or the space *between* the two.

Thus, if this first proposition is concerned with the overall 'what' (or function) of these managers' work, those that follow move more into the 'why' and the 'how' territory. In process-orientated terms they are most appropriately expressed in the form of gerunds.

So, these cultural managers make particular types of things happen with and for other people and seek to ensure a long term future, through a number of actions and '*inter*-actions' (Hernes & Maitlis, 2010, p. 3), which are identified as follows:

***II. Placing 'the work', 'company values' and 'the ensemble' at the centre of their daily doings, their participation in leading and their professional sense of identity***

• ***The work***

All expressed a strong belief in what they described as the 'power' of theatre (to provoke, challenge, entertain and bring out the best in people) and in the quality, excitement and innovative nature of 'the work' produced and promoted by their own companies. This they described as both a motivator and reward for their efforts. Seeing, facilitating and bringing 'good' theatre into the public domain, was articulated as both a personal and societal 'need'; something that gave them a buzz and deep sense of personal and professional satisfaction. They were also clear that their company's reputation rested largely on the ongoing quality and excitement of the artistic work; work that would not 'exist' until it was experienced by a particular constituency, a process they played a key role in brokering.

Cultural products are valued for their meaning ... and are consumed in an act of interpretation... (Thompson, Jones & Warhurst, 2007, pp. 628-629).

This commitment was given added urgency and edge through an external operating environment which they constructed as complex, risky and uncertain.

These cases are all involved in managing tiny subsidised theatre organisations with unstable support mechanisms and multiple external stakeholders with whom good relationships must be built and sustained: public funders, trusts and

foundations, sponsors, donors, partners, audiences/users/participants, print, online and broadcast media. Their companies produce or enable work that is aesthetic, interpretive and experimental; consumer demand/reception is uncertain; products and producing processes have rapid turnaround; and success is unpredictable (Voss, Cable & Giraud Voss, 2000, p. 331).

While it is debatable whether these factors are exclusive to the arts (an issue that is raised later), the fact is these cases *believe* that their organisations' creative work is important, different and under fairly constant threat, and that it is a major part of their job to make sure the work is enabled on an ongoing basis.

- **Values**

Alongside a belief in the importance of the work, all three cases expressed a very strong adherence to the espoused values of their companies, which are inextricably bound up with the work. These were broadly compatible with the value dimensions identified by Voss et al. (2000, p. 335) in their study of the relationships between non-profit professional theatres and *external* constituents in the US:

*Prosocial*: expanding... access to and appreciation for art;

*Artistic*: intrinsic drive for artistic creativity, innovation and independence;

*Financial*: ensuring the current and longer term financial stability and security of the company;

*Market*: commitment to customer [/user/participant] satisfaction;

*Achievement*: striving for publicly recognized excellence [positive reputation].

In addition, the cases cited the importance of values underpinning the working relationships *inside* their organisations. Again, there was a high degree of consensus in the words used to describe these: collaborative, familial, creative, trusting, open and fun.

They felt it was vital that all these values were shared and enacted within and across their organisations, and the reasons they gave were again strongly echoed by Voss et al. (2000, p. 344):

...it is possible that values are particularly prominent in non-profit cultural industries. Individuals accept significantly less pay...than they would for similar jobs in the for-profit sector due to the intrinsic rewards of value-fulfilment ... perhaps resulting in an industry where values are intensely salient and thus more directly applicable to organizational decision making.

These managers saw themselves as having a particular responsibility for upholding and inducting others into company values, and ensuring that choices and decisions of all kinds would be sufficiently congruent with them.

- ***Ensemble***

All three were equally dedicated to collective engagement and ensemble in company working (Beirne & Knight, 2002a, pp. 7-8), both inside and outside the rehearsal studio/creative space.

According to Radosavljevic (2013), ensemble is synonymous with the collective and/or collaborative ethos of a creative team, with ensemble-*working* becoming a default methodology for theatre-making more broadly, as it is discernible even among practitioners who do not work under the banner of an ensemble (pp. 11-12).

It is certainly important for companies engaging in devising processes and strategies. As Mermikides and Smart write, quoting from Theatre O's website:

The successful make-up of the group is often the hardest and most painful thing to achieve. If done well, however, then half the battle is already won. The absolute commitment of everyone is essential... Quite simply, Theatre O is only as good and as exciting as the sum of the people who are involved in the creation of the company's work (2010, p. 143).

Similarly, Complicite state that "what is essential is collaboration...between individuals to establish an ensemble with a common physical and imaginative language" (2010, p. 10).

Thus, sharing of vision, commitment, values and language is seen as a *prerequisite* for making successful and innovative theatre work (particularly where devising processes and strategies are preferred) and essential for keeping the ensemble going, the better to *keep on* making successful and

innovative work (albeit with the periodic injection of new people to avoid staleness, and lazy or reductive groupthink).

There are signs of change in recent reconsiderations of ensemble as encompassing the 'whole company' (rather than being restricted to the creative team), with dual leadership between the artistic director and executive director (the norm in many theatre companies, including BTH and MTH) rebranded as "ensemble leadership" (Hewison, Holden & Jones, 2010). Certainly the idea of ensemble as a "value, as well as a description of a particular way of organising people: a way of being as much as a way of doing" (Hewison et al, 2010, p.18) was something that these cases subscribed to.

It is important to stress at this point that the elements just described (a commitment to ensemble, values, the work) are not only intertwined, they were clearly *replicated across all three companies*. The cases felt it was a central and continuous part of their job, passionately and unequivocally to uphold, protect and sustain them – as illustrated in the earlier 'day in the life' descriptions (AU and the issue of the image on the Tin poster) and the accounts of longer-term direction making (as in the resonance between the data and processes and strategies of devising for theatre).

Once again, this brings to mind Bourdieu's "habitus":

...a set of durable values, practices and dispositions which is both structured and structuring. The habitus is the context in which we understand the world and acquire beliefs, values and knowledge through practice. Further it is through practice that the habitus manifests itself at the moment when a specific problem is approached and 'solved' through a particular set of dispositions (Barker, 2004, p. 81).

Furthermore, habitus is a meeting of the subjective and the objective structures of society (p. 81), emphasising the point that a sharing of disposition is not simply the product of an hermetically sealed group; it is unavoidably contextual – socially, economically, politically and culturally.

From a sensemaking perspective, this sharedness (the work, values, ensemble) is the domain of nouns i.e. "more stable constellations of factors [labels] around which people organize...around which stability of meaning revolves in relative stability" (Hernes, 2008, pp. 117-119). It allows for the imposition of "an

unambiguous interpretation upon ambiguous signals” and the security of a “generic subjectivity” which, unlike intersubjectivity “is embedded in structures such as rules, habits and routines” (p. 122).

This should not, however, be taken to imply that sharedness is something uncontested, permanent and immutable, or that it equates with disputed and questionable notions of “shared meaning” (Weick, 1995a, pp. 41-42). It is the persistent, ongoing, safeguarding of a *sufficiency* of sharedness (p. 42) – such that action can take place – that is most important, and which, for the cultural managers in this study was a principal concern.

Moreover, it is precisely this sufficiency that provides the means by which ‘doubts’ and new ideas can be entertained, played with and ‘made sense of’. This is analogous to creative work, where, contrary to popular belief:

...what appears at first to be a random, spontaneous process actually works from a common set of values and assumptions... creative ideas are generated within certain conceptual boundaries or constraints (Bilton, 2007, p. 95)

By contrast, when certain actions or events threaten to de-stabilise these “constellations” (the most obvious example being the fictionalised situation between Fran and Andy) this is experienced as potentially disastrous – in ways and for reasons that are analogous to Weick’s “collapse of sensemaking” (Weick, 1993, 2010a).

As Phelim McDermott, artistic director of Improbable Theatre puts it:

That’s a challenge if one person goes ‘I’m not playing’. This is the difficulty in the ensemble. Because ensemble is a thing which exists only because people believe in it. And if one person says ‘It’s not going to work’, then they’ll be right. Because it will drop to the level at which the limitation of the belief is (Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 206).

For Fran, Andy was not playing (he was paying insufficient attention to the needs of his colleagues), and she feared that ensemble processes and action were being compromised as a result – with possible consequences for the work and future stability of the company.

It is significant that when Fran attempted to deal with the situation, the only options for mitigating it (having an argument, obliging Andy to change his behaviour, disciplinary measures) ran the risk of further compromising one or more of the very stabilising factors (values, ensemble) she was seeking to protect. These are what Weick terms “cosmology episodes” where not only does something (serious) occur that doesn’t make sense, but habitual tools (e.g. talking it through) don’t help to resolve it either.

Following Pye (2005), and examining this instance as an example of “organizing in terms of sensemaking in action”, this is how the scenario unfolded.

Between Fran and Andy there was a lot happening in terms of *identity construction*. In going ‘off piste’ Andy was asserting his own identity outside that of the ensemble, whereas Fran’s sense of powerlessness in addressing the situation undermined her own confidence, competence and identity in her cultural manager role.

She had clearly spent a lot of time trying to make *retrospective* sense of what had happened, and continued to do so in her summary description. She queried her contribution to *enacting* or producing the environment that unfolded and the *ongoing, social* (company) impact. She appreciated that while the *cues* she had extracted from what was happening had helped establish the reference point that something potentially damaging was occurring, she had been unable to act her way into mitigating it. In other words, her sensemaking had not enabled her to find a *plausible* (i.e. ‘noun’ or values-congruent, rather than ‘accurate’) way forward.

Consequently Fran was concerned to do everything possible to prevent a similar occurrence where the sufficiency of sharedness disintegrates “and individuals go their own way to the detriment of collective sensemaking processes and action” (Maitlis, 2005, p. 35).

Care must be taken at this point, however, to ensure that this orientation towards prevention is not taken as an endorsement of the stereotypical view of cultural managers as the suits in eternal opposition to the creatives; those whose default position is to say ‘no’ when confronted with anything that threatens the financial bottom line or their desire to control.

Once again, these cases saw themselves as safeguarding the *sufficiency* of sharedness around the values, collaborative ethos, even ‘scaffolding’ of their organisations, the *better* to support and enable the making of theatre work, on an ongoing and future-orientated basis, in the spaces in between. And it must be remembered that however much environment-shaping they engaged in, they were no less shaped by it (Pye, 2005, p. 34); the two go hand in hand.

There are nevertheless the lurking issues of mandate, authority and influence here, which somewhat inevitably bring me to the subject of the cultural manager and leadership.

- **Leadership**

It would be disingenuous to suggest that ensemble necessarily denotes an absence of hierarchy or that an absence of hierarchy inevitably brings success. Many companies which espouse ensemble principles, for example, have an artistic director:

While the material generation phase of the process may involve the performers as authors, the fixing phase represents the reassertion of the director’s authorship as she sculpts the material into shape (Harvie & Lavender, 2010, p. 106).

And notions of consensus can – under the control of a charismatic director – tip into total adherence and submission to that person’s vision at all points in the process (Mermikides & Smart, 2010). In other words, a sharedness of artistic beliefs does not necessarily require participative equality at any or every stage in the working process. And similarly, in sensemaking terms, total agreement is not always essential for collective action; sometimes collective action itself can create the requisite sufficiency of sharedness (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992).

Within the cases’ companies, “being the leadership” (Pye, 2005, p. 32) was structurally shared. KK was executive producer within the collective of producers that made up THB; SS was executive director of BTH, working closely with the artistic director whom she nominally line-managed; AU described herself as supporting the artistic director, while their working relationship was a very equal one.

“Doing the leadership” i.e. “the process by which movement [to something] is shaped” (pp. 32, 25) was also largely shared. In the two duumvirates, the

artistic director focused mainly on the theatre-making aspects of the work, while the cultural manager concentrated on delivery and/or the current and future well-being of the company *as a whole*. In THB, all these aspects of the work were shared, with KK assuming an enhanced 'organising' role.

None of the cases felt the need or desire to stand on top of a hill and yell 'Charge!' Instead they appeared "convinced that sharing secures better decisions and even greater effort from those with whom one shares influence" (Pye, 2006, p. 46). They saw themselves – as with Helgesen's women leaders (1990) – operating from the *middle* of a web rather than the *top* of a hierarchy, and in the behaviour observed (outside of crisis situations) they enacted the notion that leading is "a matter of bringing people together, who in an evolving dialectical fashion construct and reconstruct patterns of response such that mutual expectations are fulfilled" (Pye, 2005, p. 42). This was most clearly illustrated in the resonance of their future-making work with the processes and strategies of devising.

They also felt it was vitally important for them to 'walk the talk' by living up to and modelling company's values; "providing rhetoric that reflected the organisation's emerging narrative back to itself...", and ensuring that such rhetoric was mirrored in the organisation's decisions, products and "the quality of the internal and external relationships... produced" (Hewison et al., 2010, pp. 57, 119). So 'talking the walk' was essential for squaring the circle.

- ***Identity***

Implicit in the discussion so far are issues of identity – both individual and organisational.

Sensemaking is inescapably embodied and intertwined with identity (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 83).

Put another way:

...who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity (Weick, 2009, p. 142).



Not only are the cases concerned to maintain a consistent values-based company identity both inside and outside the organisation (both/and), they feel and express a strong social identification with it too. They perceive themselves as “psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group, as sharing a common destiny and experiencing its successes and failures” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104-105).

However, they don't have such a strong sense of identification with their *occupation*, preferring to distance themselves – usually with irony – from the prototypical (even stereotypical) characteristics of the cultural manager and to operate more flexibly in the background. Their espoused invisibility renders them fleet-of-foot, enabling them to shift among interactions so that the situation, and their discursive construction of self, undergo continual redefinition (Weick, 1995a, p. 20) – so both/and, again. Furthermore:

The more selves I have access to, the more meanings I should be able to extract and impose on any situation (p. 24).

Such is the strength of their motivation and commitment (assisted no doubt by issues of scale and low levels of resourcing) that their flexibility and fleet-of-footness can easily develop into workaholism. Pritchard (2002, p. 274) provides an apposite summary of this risk when quoting from Stuart Hall's review of Thatcherism (1993, p. 15):

You don't have to take the whole organization home with you every night, go to bed thinking about it, wake up at 7 am and ask 'Why aren't I at work?' The workplace has been 'moved' in other words. It has become a more central part of the performance of oneself.

In summary, then, while the first proposition attempts to encapsulate the overall purpose (or 'what') of what these cultural managers do, the second, sets out the values, principles and beliefs (the domain of nouns) that underpin, permeate and inform the ways in which they approach it. The second proposition also sets out their marked and ongoing commitment to a sufficiency of sharedness (in values, principles and beliefs) across their organisations, the better to support their colleagues and their work, and to help ensure longer term sustainability.

When taken together, the cases' close adherence to and identification with the work, company values and the notion of ensemble form a very close match with

the three kinds of sharedness that Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010, pp. 562-563, after Weick) propose are particularly important in “turbulent organizational contexts”:

- tenacious commitment...[ which] provides a foundation for acting that is vital to keep people moving forward;
- identity...which provides a vital anchor around which collectives construct meaning... [and which when threatened] constrains action as individuals and teams lose important anchors about themselves, [and]
- “expectations... [that] connect with cues to create meanings” which are then filtered against those meanings “to build up confidence about a definition of the situation”.

How they enact and persistently work at this on a day to day basis is the subject of the seven propositions that follow. They do this by:

***III. Constantly and seamlessly shifting register – (individual/collective; inside/outside; means/ends; tight/loose)***

As was apparent across the earlier pattern of doings and all four thematic strands in the preceding chapter, these cases operated through continuous action (“staying in motion” Weick, 2009, p. 266) and were in a constant state of readiness for more action.

In their day to day activities, there was a discernible movement between particular thematic continua or interdependent polarities, which were framed as individual/collective; inside/outside; means/ends; and tight/loose. Thus, one moment they might be holding the ‘big picture’ and the next focusing on pragmatic detail; or operating invisibly in their organisation and then very visibly ‘performing the organisation’ at a press conference; expressing passion for theatre in one meeting and then discussing a possible budget deficit in the next. Moving between these interdependent polarities enabled them to spot and frequently act on opportunities (e.g. for funding or partnership opportunities) gaps or threats; make links; check people were alright; energise when things were flagging; keep the momentum going; match actions to necessary project/production stages and ongoing organisational survival; in other words to shift register as required.

On one level, this behaviour could be characterised as “reflection-in-action” (Schon, 1983):

When a manager reflects-in-action, he [sic] draws on [his] stock of organizational knowledge, adapting it to some present instance. And he also functions as an agent of organizational learning, extending or restructuring, in his present inquiry, the stock of knowledge that will be available to future inquiry (p. 242).

Again there is a strong impression of forward momentum, of ‘moving to’.

From a sensemaking perspective, it could be argued that this third proposition is the domain of “verbs” and “intersubjectivity”, rather than the “nouns” and “generic subjectivity” referred to in the second.

People who think in verbs are more likely to accept life as ongoing events into which they are thrown... Sensemaking itself is ongoing and the sense it makes, transient. Verbs force us to face that. Nouns do not (Weick, 1988, p. 188).

In intersubjective situations, with people being in direct proximity to each other, cues and hunches may be transmitted; cues that would be ambiguous in the absence of a social context (Hernes, 2008, p. 121).

And, as noted earlier, organising is what happens in the oscillation (“acting thinkingly”, Gioia, 2006, or “thinking actingly”, Mangham & Pye, 1991) *between* intersubjectivity and generic subjectivity; between realities expressed by verbs and realities expressed by nouns.

Nouns form stable bases for processes, and interact with the more fluid and emergent (Hernes, 2008, p. 122).

Moreover nouns and verbs co-evolve; nouns are unwound and set in motion as verbs, and verbs are wound into “slower motion” as nouns (Weick, 2010b, p. 102).

Certainly this is a plausible way of reading the cases’ continual shifts of register (paying attention, always on the look-out, addressing things as they come up) and their constant navigation of interdependent polarities (oscillating between verbs and nouns): both behaviours increase their readiness to combine the familiar with the unfamiliar as new things come up, something that is, arguably,

of particular importance in small, under-resourced organisations. This is the sensemaking that “takes place in the midst of the flux of materials, people, money, time, solutions, problems and choices” (Weick, 1979, p. 43, as cited in Hernes, 2008, p. 116).

Such a way of theorising gives an additional level of purpose to the “brevity, variety and fragmentation” of these cases’ activity (Mintzberg, 1973) and, perhaps provides an example of one of the ways in which – when the distance between them is comparatively short – functions and activities (Watson, 2001) operate within sight of each other.

Where this reading (of nouns and verbs) becomes more intriguing, however, is not so much around *whether* my cases do these things or not, but rather in the *manner* and *emphasis* of the doing; the pace, tone, scale, scope, mood and demeanour; in other words the domain of *adjectives* (which describe or modify nouns) and *adverbs* (which modify verbs or adjectives).

As noted in the analysis chapter, these cases were just as likely to see the ‘unexpected’ in a positive as a negative light; as an opportunity or new idea to be taken up and expanded, rather than a hazard, risk or crisis to be coped with, halted or contained (‘high reliability organising’ being predicated on the latter rather than the former). In fact, opportunities (and the excitement and sense of potential they evoked) were actively *sought* as positive things they could make happen and as a necessary antidote to problems and/or routine (the focus of much sensemaking research). These were nevertheless instances (e.g. the announcement of a new funding programme that makes an exact match with the company’s work (AU); an impromptu offer of a gig from Monkey Poetry (SS); an irresistible (and risky) opportunity to involve performers over 55 in a new circus production (KK)), where events ‘turned’, ongoing activity was interrupted, things became uncertain and the ‘story’ and ‘what to do next’ were far from clear. The difference is that these were occasions that were not *life-threatening*; rather they contained the seeds of something potentially life-(art form and organisation)-*enhancing*.

Weick (2009) maintains that successful sensemaking “is surprisingly indifferent to content” and that the important thing is that whatever it is

...animates people...; provides a direction...; encourages updating...; and facilitates respectful interaction... [because] it is these four activities that make it easier or harder for people to collectively make sense of what they are facing and to deal with it (p. 267).

This would seem to suggest that it is immaterial whether what is being navigated is constructed as an opportunity or a threat. Threat and disaster are nevertheless the default setting in much of Weick's work and that, I would suggest, is a very particular class of content, which not only circumscribes the range of responses (because lives or livelihoods are at risk), but also implies that unequivocal, uncertainty and unpredictability (though inevitable) are invariably unwelcome. This extends to the emotional sphere as well: while Weick notes that "positive emotions broaden the range of what people see and think..." (2010, p. 545), they correspondingly "prevent...people from bracketing contradictory cues until it is too late" (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 555).

While my cases' problem-related oscillations were addressed with urgency; in other more opportunity-orientated circumstances (which were no less unknowable and unpredictable, and often no less urgent either) their doings were differently inflected. When navigating the latter, they were far more inclined (and indeed highly motivated) not only to "drop the heavy tools of rationality" but enthusiastically to throw them to one side, in favour of "intuitions, feelings, stories, active listening, shared humanity, capability for fascination, awe, novel words and empathy" (Weick, 2009, p. 268). Here, the question 'what's the story?' often triggered something closer to Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief", and 'what shall we do?' a response akin to 'let's say yes and then work out how we can make it happen'. In these instances, their sensemaking had a noticeably different quality: a predisposition to success was differently nuanced to a preoccupation with failure. This is explored further in the fourth proposition.

#### ***IV. Exercising 'flexible' mindfulness and a high tolerance (and indeed enjoyment) of ambiguity, uncertainty and equivocality***

We attribute the success of HROs [high reliability organisations] in managing the unexpected to their determined efforts to act *mindfully* (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 18).

In their article 'Organizing for Mindfulness', Weick and Putnam, (2006, reprinted in Weick, 2009) contrast Eastern and Western approaches to mindfulness.

The first is grounded in Buddhist teachings, and pays attention to the *internal processes* of mind, where mindfulness means "having the ability to hang on to current objects; remember them; and not lose sight of them through distraction, wandering attention, associative thinking, explaining away, or rejection" (p. 86). They describe this state as "not wobbling" (p. 86); it is "moment-to-moment, nonreactive, nonjudgmental awareness" (Kabat-Zinn, 2002, p. 69, as cited in Weick, 2009, p. 92).

In theatre, this approach has influenced a branch of actor training, notably through the work of Phillip Zarrilli (2002, 2004), a key proponent of "a psychophysical paradigm and approach to awakening the actors' bodymind in performance" who specialises in "intensive pre-performative processes combining yoga and Asian martial arts - *kalarippayattu* from Kerala, India, and *taiqiauan* Wu style from China" ([www.exeter.ac.uk/drama/staff/zarrilli/](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/drama/staff/zarrilli/)).

The second approach Weick and Putnam characterise as

...paying attention to *external events* and to the *content* of the mind, those contents including things such as past associations, concepts, reifications, and semblances of sensed objects" (2009, p. 90, italics added).

The chief exponent of this view is Ellen Langer, who summarises mindfulness as "the process of drawing novel distinctions" which can lead to a number of diverse consequences, including:

- a greater sensitivity to one's environment;
- more openness to new information;
- the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and
- enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem-solving.

In their ongoing shifts of focus and register, my cases could be seen as engaging in Langer's process of drawing novel distinctions, with the consequences outlined above clearly discernible in their behaviour (see proposition three). This is another way of capturing their always-on-the-look-outness; multi-tasking; and attention to diverse stakeholders, constituencies and calls on their time.

In terms of “high reliability organising” the emphasis is more on the Western approach to mindfulness, and here the important thing is quality of attention.

HROs become more vulnerable to error when their attention is distracted, unstable, and dominated by abstractions. All three of these predispose people to misestimate, misunderstand and misspecify what they think they face. Distractions often take the form of associative thinking (“That reminds me of a time when...”), which draws attention away from the present and from an awareness of change and substitutes abstract ideas for concrete details (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, pp. 32-33).

In times of sudden difficulty or immediate threat (e.g. a theft, a broken-down van, a cast member suddenly taken ill), the cases and their colleagues exercised mindfulness in an HRO manner, i.e. paying more attention to failure than success; avoiding simplicity rather than cultivating it; being just as sensitive to operations as strategy; organising for resilience rather than anticipation, and allowing decisions to migrate to those with the necessary expertise to make them.

When considering longer term planning issues or new, positive, creative possibilities, however, their mindfulness took on a different mood, tone and inflection; something of “a playful orientation”. Barry and Meisiek (2010, p. 2) describe this as using and encouraging distractions, context shifting, and de-familiarisation in a “look *elsewhere* while attending to the current state of things” kind of way. Likewise the cases here messed about, joked, teased, parodied and riffed, as if to “vary the stimulus...mindfully notice new things...and improve attention” (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 3). Thus:

If organizational members only focus on the task in hand, they may become bored, tired, and feel like life has drained out of them...As slack increases different things might happen (Terkel, 1997, and Roy, 1959, as cited in Barry & Meisiek, 2010, p. 18).

This suggests a destabilisation of routine *in favour of* the distracting and different, which promotes mindful attention because one *wants* to look, rather than because one *has* to (p. 5).

From a theatre perspective, a combination of close ties within the ensemble, a deliberate playfulness as part of the devising and making of work, and a

seriousness of purpose are an important part of the rhetoric of theatre-making, particularly in micro-scale companies. Here, 'error' is given a different complexion. Phelim McDermott (Improbable Theatre), believes that the process is designed almost to *ensure* that 'accidents' will happen and that 'safe emergencies' will occur as a vital part of generating ideas and putting the piece together, such that "the collective conversation that happens can bring forth things from performers they'd never known they could do" (Radosavljevic, 2013, pp. 206-207).

In this context, then, 'errors' and 'discrepant cues' are things to be hoped for and generated rather than prevented from happening. They are constructed as source material to be used, played with and learned from – even stored for a future occasion.

Consequently, there is an uncertainty *built in* to the process, alongside an implicit *requirement* to hold ambiguity and contradictory thought for periods of time, in order to see where they might lead. Again, according to arts rhetoric: "...that is part of the fun. In fact, if I knew for certain that a new idea would work, constructing it would probably seem tedious instead of exciting" (Langer, 2006, p. 17, as cited in Barry & Meisiek, 2010, p. 18).

Furthermore, as Barry and Meisiek assert:

The arts use artifacts and analogical processes to make our familiar sensemaking resources *unfamiliar*, to discover new ways through them, and to make them more deeply meaningful (2010, p. 2, italics added).

The cases here manage companies whose *business* is the disrupting, challenging, playing with and making of meaning, not solely (or even necessarily) in a cognitive sense, but in a sensory, emotional and aesthetic sense too.

Barry and Meisiek (2010, p. 16) identify ways in which sensemaking and mindfulness might differ in arts-orientated activity "through a balancing of closeness and distance, and through a playful orientation". This, they contrast with Weick, Sutcliffe and Obsfeld's (1999) "work-focused mindfulness in high reliability organisations, where distance and playfulness would be regarded as dangerous" (Barry & Meisiek, 2010, p. 16).



The contention of this proposition, then, is that alongside the mindfulness deemed necessary for high reliability organising, these managers *also* exhibit a predisposition to deliberate and *essential* playfulness within (the serious business of) theatre-making and the high tolerance of uncertainty, ambiguity and equivocality this implies. This is an important part of the context within which they understand and construct the world. It is not surprising, then, that through their *own* practice, this habitus manifests itself in the aptitudes, assumptions, dispositions (Barker, 2004, p. 81) and *flexible mindfulness* they enact on a day-to-day basis.

**V. *Using communication and personalisation as a proxy for formal structures, rules and guidelines and to build and sustain good relationships (internally and externally)***

...sensemaking is an issue of language, talk and communication, whereby situations, organizations and environments are *talked* into existence. (Hernes, 2008, pp. 116-117).

The constitutive use of language is implicit in the first four propositions. It is the medium through which the cases (with others) talk the importance of the work, values and ensemble into being; enact 'leading'; engage in identity work; navigate interdependent polarities; and become involved – with others – in flexible mindfulness.

Each of these managers is an inveterate communicator, managing a company that is explicitly in the business of creating and communicating (and disrupting) meaning, often, though not always, in story form. They operate, unavoidably, within and out of a storying space.

As Boje writes "...in organizations, storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders" (1991, p. 106). Stories can be "terse" (abbreviated and succinct) or more linear and emplotted. As is clear from the analysis chapter, these cases co-create, gather and tell stories *inside* the organisation; "centring" stories which say "Here we are. This is what we do. This is what we strive for" (Boyce, 1995, p. 111). They also translate and share stories *outside* – in the form of project proposals, funding applications, plans, budgets and accounts, reports, media and social events. Moreover, they feed external stories – policy developments, partnership

and promotional opportunities, spending reviews, funding opportunities and cuts – *back in*. They engage constantly in “stories...as recursive, reciprocal and interactive sensemaking and sensegiving vehicles...that shape meaning” (Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 43), while taking overall responsibility for ensuring a plausible fit with company work and values (which also inevitably evolve in the process) – so back to a sufficiency of sharedness again.

Moreover this was not a purely cognitive exercise; it was also “embodied, embedded, responsive, [and] temporal... draw[ing] on past experiences, present interactions and future anticipations” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012, p. 80). These cases’ sensemaking was often triggered by hunches, and bodily sensations (exciting, uncomfortable) and resultant ‘accounts’ were just as frequently tested for plausibility on the basis of how they felt (right, good, wrong).

This constant communication was also considered vital for “relationships of respectful interaction and heedful interrelating” (Weick, 2009, p. 274) within a tiny and over-stretched company. Where (as with BTH and MTH) some semblance of departments did exist (e.g. marketing or stage design), these managers worked hard to keep the membranes between them as conversationally permeable as possible. This in turn reinforced the importance of regular staff meetings to oil the wheels of intersubjectivity and to troubleshoot, story-share and gap/opportunity-spot.

Further impetus was added through the most significant structuring device deployed by each company: the creative project or production which provides rhythm and punctuation points to the everyday ongoing stream of events and activity. The cultural manager’s role as expert communicator is here both vital and complex. She is responsible for bringing the ‘soft’ and the ‘hard’ architectures (DeFillippi, Grabher & Jones, 2007, p. 514) of the project together.

To make [it] happen, [she] supports its creative development, working within the internal world ...to devise, structure and support the process that will bring it to fruition. Externally, [she] must also position the idea, build and hold together the framework of relationships and of meaning that will attract the necessary support and finance, and engage those for whom it is intended (Tyndall, 2007, p. 2).

Moving iteratively between these internal and external polarities requires shifts in power – in particular between the cultural manager and the artistic director – which must be continually negotiated within the company in ways that may be ‘tight’ or ‘loose’, depending on the stage in the production or project process. It also means taking the emotional temperature throughout. There was an implicit understanding on the part of these managers that for those engaged in making the work “positive felt emotions can broaden attention and thought-action repertoires, [and]... increase resilience and individuals’ ability to cope with stressors” (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 568) – hence the cultural manager’s constant reassurances that ‘it’s going to be alright’. At the same time, however, she needed to keep the bigger picture in view, staying on the look-out for and dealing with opportunities and threats on the way to ensuring that the project or production *would* successfully meet those for whom it was intended, in the right place, and at the designated time.

In addition, since projects or productions often involve participants or freelances (performers, designers, choreographers etc.), who are both new to and previously known by the company, each project group can be subtly or significantly different for each one. Thus within the permanent organisation, there are successive or concurrent “temporary systems” (Goodman & Goodman, 1976), and therefore more and new people to integrate into the ways of the ensemble. In such a dynamic context, coordination, trust and a sufficiency of sharedness need to be continually recreated through interaction, whilst recognising that interaction is both constituted by and constitutive of process (Weick, 1993, pp. 644-645).

These cases – contrary to cultural management stereotypes – seemed to appreciate that formal rules and structures do not fit all eventualities; whatever seems fixed is only contingent; what works with one group or production will not necessarily work with the next; and the best ‘solutions’ are often personalised, accidental or ad hoc. Making sense of discrepant moments means turning them into words, embodying them in texts (spoken or written) and enacting them in more talk, and other kinds of action – a process that is ongoing, swift, social, and easily taken for granted (Weick, 2009, p. 131).

As Weick writes:

...the order in organizational life comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general, and the sustained. To work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that smallness does not equate with insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have large consequences (2009, p. 132).

Uncertainty is an acknowledged part of the internal and external environment in which my cases operate: working with and through it by talk, is a necessary part of their daily doings, which are not solely related to the immediate and the ongoing (intersubjective, verbs and adverbs) but to the future (generic subjectivity, nouns and adjectives) as well.

**VI. *Taking a collaborative and devised approach to direction making; paying attention to cognitive, embodied and aesthetic dimensions***

Strategic thinking requires both divergent and convergent thinking, overlapping and alternating with each other, and reflects a multi-dimensional process-orientated model of creative thinking ... [Moreover] [s]trategy is not fixed, continually adapting to changing realities and inputs (Bilton, 2007, pp. 95-96).

In all three companies, productions and projects were iteratively and collaboratively constructed from a notion, idea or text that was worked into something new. Likewise, in all three, strategy-making was accomplished through an iterative and collaborative process of “guided” sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005). While the first was ultimately the responsibility of the artistic director, and the second the responsibility of the cultural manager, there was a striking similarity in the ‘devising’ process adopted for each, as set out in the analysis chapter and exemplified by Glass’s (2003) five stage model:

- preparation (creating a safe, productive and informal environment);
- creative origination (eliciting, generating, exploring and developing ideas; questioning and opening up scope);
- creative organisation (focusing, structuring, drawing ideas together, developing overall ‘meaning’);
- manifestation/presentation (performing, with continued evolution and development);

- reflection/renewal (critical reflection, giving and receiving feedback, setting new goals for the future).

It should be reiterated that these stages do not follow a linear order, are not always clearly differentiated, and tend to overlap, looping backwards and forwards in a manner likened to “creative cycling”(Glass, 2003, p. 9). In addition, while the process always starts with *something*: a notion, a kernel of an idea, even a solid intention; it is expected that material will emerge from and during the process (which is frequently collaborative), so a significant part of devising is to *not know* at the start how things will play out.

As the director, I may sit down and say ‘I think that this play is about this’, and I have a concept of what the show is about and it’s a very intellectual concept. But actually the group discovers that in the process of putting on *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* something else is being dreamt up in the group that’s got nothing to do with it, and these strange things – that’s gold for them (Phelim McDermott, quoted in Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 205).

Returning once more to a sensemaking perspective, Weick likens 21<sup>st</sup> century leading (i.e. moving *to* something), to navigating by means of a compass rather than a map.

Maps, by definition, can help only in known worlds – worlds that you have charted before. Compasses are helpful when you are not sure where you are and can only get a general sense of direction” (Hurst, 1995, p. 168) ...[so] the compass and the compass needle, which function much like human values, are the mainstays of learning and renewal (Weick, 2009, p. 264).

He also asserts that those doing the leading need to question, stay in touch with context, and focus on the following:

- animation (getting people moving, experimenting updating and interacting);
- improvisation (making something out of previous experience, practice and knowledge);
- lightness (“dropping tools” to access intuitions, feelings, story-making, active listening etc.);

- authentication (saying 'I don't know' to invite, rather than preclude, finding out more);
- learning (moving from not knowing to something learned).

The idea is that these properties activate the seven conditions of sensemaking: social resources, clear identity, retrospect, cue utilisation, update of ongoing impressions, plausibility, and enactment = SIR COPE (p. 270).

There are clear points of contact here between these two approaches (Glass and Weick): the idea that people “generate that which they then interpret” (Weick, 1995, p. 13); the sense of moving *to* something; the importance of ‘we’ rather than just ‘I’; the value in improvisation; the simultaneity of doubt and belief; the benefits of not knowing as stimulus for others; the power of collective mindfulness (Weick, 2009, pp. 261-271) and the championing of process (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 223).

In addition, however, there are ways in which devising processes and strategies can *add* to this conversation about sensemaking and 21<sup>st</sup> century leading, through the prism of this enquiry into what cultural managers do.

Devising is inseparable from context: these cases have absorbed, embodied and seem to enact some the processes (and behaviours) of devising that are used in their companies – as a result of working in a particular kind of creative environment which produces particular symbolic goods in this way. The strategising (future-making) process they engaged in explicitly encouraged creative, sensory and nonsensical thinking, alongside editing, shaping and structuring. Making the familiar strange and following where that leads was just as likely to co-exist with making the strange familiar. The resultant accounts (plans, strategies, proposals) were judged by the contributors (and specifically the manager) to be ‘good’ on aesthetic as well as effectiveness grounds, depending on the extent to which they produced “felt meaning (bypassing conscious critical filters);...connectedness (a resonance with personal experience); ...and enjoyment for its own sake (independent of any instrumental outcomes)” (Taylor, Fisher & Dufresne, 2002, pp. 315-317), which suggests a broader, aesthetic notion of “what works” (Nelson, 2006). Such accounts were thus closer to montage: “an *artwork* that brings together assorted material but forges it into a new whole” (Graver, 1995, p. 31, as cited in Mermikides & Smart, 2010, pp. 157-158, italics added), than bricolage in Weick’s usage as

creating “*order* out of whatever materials are at hand” (1993, p. 639, italics added).

Accordingly, both the processes and products of devising *inside* the studio and the devising-*inflected* approach of my cases to direction-making *outside*, grow out of and feed back into whole company notions of the work, values and ensemble.

Thus, perhaps devising (as a way of organising) offers something in addition to “running through a script” or an “instance of improvisation”. Like both these activities, devising also relates to “readings which have reference to appreciative systems which are, in turn, reflections of deeply held beliefs and values” (Mangham & Pye, 1991, p. 36). In addition, however:

Distributed creativity...can occur in single encounters *and across multiple encounters*... with the intention of generating a creative product... This latter situation is the norm in the performing arts, in which musical or theatre ensembles rehearse many times *over weeks or months to generate a collectively created performance* (Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009, pp. 82-83, italics added).

Weick is clear that lying just below the surface of his discussions is the implication that imagination is an imperative of organising (2005, p. 274). I would suggest that the devised, collaborative doings of my cultural managers give a useful example of this, in action.

### **VII. *Emphasising and enacting ‘knowing how’, through which they build ‘knowing that’***

There are those who choose the swampy lowlands. They deliberately involve themselves in messy but crucially important problems and, when asked to describe their methods of inquiry, they speak of experience, trial and error, intuition, and muddling through (Schon, 1983, p. 43).

The earlier analysis chapter made much of the cases’ adherence to informality in their learning, with knowledge, skills and approaches acquired primarily through ‘doing’ and observing/working closely with others, particularly early-career role models. It is significant that only one of them had undertaken any kind of direct preparatory training (KK), something that is still far from unusual in the field.

When these managers talk of experiential learning, they are referring to contextually specific “knowledge how to do things”, rather than “factual knowledge” or “knowing that” in the Western theoretical tradition, where mind is separate from body and theory is privileged over practice (Nelson, 2006).

Nelson (2006, p. 107) recalls Pears’ (1971, pp. 26-27) analogy of cycling to illustrate the distinction:

I know how to ride a bicycle, but I cannot say how I balance because I have no method. I may know that certain muscles are involved, but that factual knowledge comes later, if at all, and it could hardly be used in instruction.

Nelson similarly juxtaposes factual knowledge of the emergence of a new dance approach which might be gained through reading, and knowing how to dance in the manner of (say) Merce Cunningham, which is more “a matter of having trained with practitioners in that tradition” (2006, p. 107).

A crucial part of the “know-how” is in the feel of the dancing, just as the feel of balance is the crux of knowing how to ride a bicycle (p. 107).

While Nelson is concerned with practice-as-research and an art form (dance) which is explicitly related to the body, there are links with the cases’ reliance on ‘felt’ meaning, and their close adherence to the working methods of other cultural management practitioners whom they admire, copy and learn from. Far from suggesting, as some have done (Hewison, 2004), that cultural managers are resistant to learning, it rather begs questions about how they prefer to learn.

It is as if, in navigating the swampy lowlands, the cases prefer the kind of learning that “results not in hard, factual, content based knowledge, but a relational, processual knowledge” (Nelson, 2006, p. 114), not least because much of their day-to-day work *is itself* both relational and process-orientated.

I do not wish to suggest here – as some critics have done – that cultural managers are so mired in pragmatics that they operate in a theory-free zone. My point is more connected with the conundrum of the chicken and the egg.

As Pears points out:

The ability to respond to circumstances in a discriminatory way must precede the ability to codify the responses, if only because the use of



distinct symbols to codify them is itself an example, indeed a sophisticated example, of a discriminatory response... [thus] practice nearly always comes first, and it is only later that people theorize about practice (1971, pp. 28-29, as cited in Nelson, 2006, p. 114).

There is more than an echo here of Weick's (1988, pp. 305-306) assertion that:

...the explorer cannot know what he [sic] is facing until he faces it, and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened, a sequence that involves retrospective sensemaking. But the act of exploring itself has an impact on what is being explored, which means that parts of what the explorer discovers retrospectively are consequences of his own making.

In other words the theory-practice relationship is more complicated than the simple acquisition of the former which is then applied to the latter. And not knowing what you are going to get is built in to the context and the work (the habitus) of the companies which the cases manage. This is more the domain of praxis – “theory imbricated within practice” (Nelson, 2013, p. 5), or a kind of dialectical both/and approach – which relies just as much on problem-*setting* as problem-*solving* (Schon, 1983, p. 41) in the face of uncertainty. Indeed, uncertainty can be a trigger for reflection-in-action, which in turn can lead to noticing, discovering and then learning.

As Schon implies, and as the earlier propositions confirm, the nature and context of the uncertainty prompts *different* questions and therefore arguably *different* learning trajectories and learning outcomes for managers. So in encountering something puzzling the question may be “How can I understand [or make sense of] this?” or when spotting an opportunity, the manager might ask “What can I make of [or create out of] this?”; and when surprised by the unanticipated success of some “intuitive knowing” she might wonder “What have I really been doing?” (Schon 1983, p. 241).

These cases' reflection-in-action was certainly well practised in relation to the first two questions above. All three managers were clear, however, that opportunities to address the third were not as plentiful as they would like, in large part because of the speed, pace and volume of their work.

Managers do reflect-in-action, but they seldom reflect *on* their reflection-in-action...hence [a] crucially important dimension of their art tends to remain

private and inaccessible to others. Moreover, because awareness of one's intuitive thinking usually grows out of practice in articulating it to others, managers often have little access to their own reflection-in action (Schon, 1983, p. 243, italics added).

Thus while these managers regularly instigated and engaged in reviews of *organisational* initiatives, programmes and productions and supported *others* in learning through and from their work, it was rare for them (with the exception of KK) to do it for *themselves* or to be in a position where someone else could do it with them – hence, perhaps, their interest in the reflection-on-action afforded by another colleague observing and conversing with them in the course of this enquiry.

Current understandings of learning in professional communities often refer to the power of 'dialogue' as a process in which our learning grows exponentially. Dialogue here refers to purposeful conversations, undertaken in situations where there is time for quality interactions and reflection (Summerton, 2010, p. 118).

Referring back to the Cultural Leadership Programme (CLP) (page 31), the positive response of managers who took part in coaching, workshop, action learning or networking activities, provides compatible evidence of an appetite to learn with others as part of a community of practice (Kay, 2011).

Once again, this should not be taken to mean that CLP was consequently 'theory lite': what it did – as much by accident as design – was to *combine* opportunities to explore theoretical knowledge with a respectful recognition of the equal importance of 'practical wisdom [which] combines knowledge with experience and good judgement' (Summerton, 2010, p. 115).

Here, stories and talking again emerge as significant. First:

Storytelling is a significant part of the learning process. Stories reflect the complexity of actual practice rather than the abstractions taught in the classrooms. As stories evolve, a richer understanding of the phenomenon is developed, and new integrated approaches to solving problems are created. Stories themselves become the repository of wisdom (Crossan et al., 1999, p. 329, as cited in Taylor et al., 2002, p. 319).

Second, stories *about* cultural management can be legitimately countered (or corroborated) in stories *by* cultural managers, thus allowing for “dominant discourses... and hierarchically privileged perceptions of truth” (Rhodes, 2001, p. 227, as cited in Humphreys et al., 2012, p. 45) to be debated, challenged and refashioned.

These cultural managers – like others in the field – find out what they think when they see what they say, in the company of others.

A liking for this kind of direct engagement also dovetails with cultural managers’ previously reported preferences for activist-pragmatist ways of learning (Summerton et al., 2006) i.e. a liking for learning through activity which is closely connected with ‘real life’.

While short courses are well suited to activist pragmatists, it has been argued ...that academic programmes generally fit better with reflector and theorist learning styles (Hutchins et al., 2007, p. 40).

The emerging implication (for cultural managers in general and my cases in particular), is that in a relational and process-orientated field, largely populated by activist-pragmatists who place a premium on ‘knowing how’ as a means of ‘knowing that’, learning experiences (in formal education, CPD or day-to-day work) are likely to be more effective when they reflect congruent principles of learning, and they balance “grassroots or tacit knowledge with the vast array of publicly available ideas and theories regarding leadership, management and organisation” (Summerton, 2010, p. 115). Or as a participatory arts worker put it (ArtWorks North East, 2012, p. 12): “there’s a difference between teaching that’s done to you rather than with you”.

Langer (1997, p. 23) describes this kind of merging of bottom up and top down as “sideways learning” which relies on openness to novelty, alertness to distinction, sensitivity to different contexts, implicit awareness of multiple perspectives and orientation in the present.

Such “soft vigilance” (p. 44) was evident in the cases’ perpetual ‘register-shifting’, use of communication as a proxy for structure, and play as a form of enquiry. It was also manifest in their collaborative and devised approach to direction-making. This, in turn, is compatible with Antonacopoulou and Bento’s (2004, p. 2008) notion of “learning leadership” i.e. learning to adopt multiple

perspectives, recognizing the talent of others and encouraging it to grow, and learning from others. Or once again, developing a community of practice (p. 86): “a way of exploring collectively the meanings of activities from which knowledge and learning derive and contribute to individual and collective development” (p. 86). Furthermore, they maintain that it is only possible to enact these things if one “cares” (p. 92), which loops back to the importance of values, ensemble, commitment to my cases’ organisations and (as illustrated by the story of Fran and Andy) their own biggest observed challenge:

[how to reconcile] the individual’s need of creative expression, reward, liberty, with the need to be part of a social system that is efficient, responsive and liberating rather than conformist, restricting and inefficient? (Hewison et al., 2010, p. 18).

Such apparent paradoxes are the subject of the eighth proposition.

### ***VIII. Blurring, ignoring or collapsing the arts/management and culture/commerce divides***

The idea of a dualism between artists and arts managers and creativity and commerce – as set out in the literature review – is well rehearsed. Over the past fifty years, it has provided the backdrop for much discussion about the role and identity of the cultural manager. However, recent qualitative and case-study investigations have begun to reconfigure or question these divides from a range of perspectives.

One of these – a curious mix of the ‘divide’ and ‘dauntless’ strands in cultural management and policy literature and ‘the art of...’ field in management and organisation studies – is the notion of creativity as a strategic business process (Jeffcutt & Pratt, 2002, p. 226). Here, examples have been drawn from organisations in the cultural industries to show how “organizations and individuals step around underlying paradoxes [e.g. between utilitarian and aesthetic logics] or reveal premises as false about how to manage creativity” (DeFillippi et al., 2007, pp. 516-517).

These considerations are queried and taken further through this eighth proposition, with specific reference to my cultural managers’ doings.

Interest in the cultural industries (of which micro-scale theatre organisations form part) by management scholars has been fostered by the assumption that

the issues faced by the former (e.g. ...fragmentation, risk, uncertainty, intangibility... (Bilton, 2007, p. xx)) are becoming increasingly important for managers in other industries and sectors:

Many other industries are gravitating towards the use of some combination of knowledge and creativity in order to generate and sustain competitive advantage... Because firms in the cultural industries have long had to deal with this challenge, their experience contains significant lessons for other industries (Lampel, Lant & Shamsie, 2000, p. 264).

So, rather than organisation and management practices in the cultural industries being largely dismissed as odd, deficient or anomalous, as was historically the case for the arts (DeFillippi et al., 2007), they have been put under the spotlight as potential forerunners or exemplars of how knowledge-based, project businesses more widely will have to run themselves in the future.

Much of this investigative work is based around notions of polarity and paradox. For example, Lampel et al. (2000) maintain that there are five opposing polarities (divides) which shape organisational practices in the cultural industries: expression of artistic values vs. the economics of mass entertainment; seeking novelty vs. too much product differentiation; satisfying existing demand vs. extending and transforming the market; vertically integrating diverse activities under one roof vs. maintaining creative vitality through flexible specialization; and building creative systems without suppressing individual inspiration “which is ultimately at the root of creating value in the cultural industries” (p. 263). The idea here is that there are lessons to be found in the ways cultural enterprises handle these opposing imperatives in order to create, produce, market and distribute cultural goods (p. 263-264).

As Jeffcutt and Pratt (2002) point out though, just because cultural organisations produce creative products, this does not necessarily mean that they offer a potential model that can be transferred elsewhere, nor are they inevitably any more or less creative than any other kind of enterprise. In fact these authors regard the assumption of a golden ticket as a further example of an “essentialising dualism” which reinforces – albeit by default – the constructed division between creativity on the one hand and rationalism on the other. Like Bilton and Leary (2002), cited earlier, they reject the idea of a dualism between creatives and suits, preferring instead to talk of dualities. This does not mean

that they see no value in examining the management of cultural industries (with an emphasis on the *plural*: micro businesses and large multi-national corporations, orchestras and touring theatre companies are of different scales and have their own situated knowledge, identities and ecologies). Rather they see such examinations as interesting and necessary, because “questions of organisation, management and governance [particularly at the micro and meso scales] are fundamental to *understanding the cultural industries*” in all their variety (p. 230, italics added).

The above perspectives offer some resonance with my analysis: dualities instead of dualisms, a process-orientation rather than properties, and lots of working ‘in between’. There are nevertheless some crucial distinctions to be drawn out and additional points made.

While these writers speculate (at a fairly high level of abstraction) on the ‘why’ of what cultural managers do, and Bilton, in particular, makes incursions into aspects of the ‘what’ (role playing and planning, forming teams, communicating with them and supporting their work), there is little consideration of the ‘how’ of their working activity on an empirical day-to-day level, which is what the propositions here are largely derived from.

What the propositions here reveal about the ‘how’ is as follows.

Prevailing dualisms and stereotypes about artists and managers and creativity and commerce are part of the (largely external) noun territory that my cases either ignore, or acknowledge in an ‘it-goes-without-saying’ kind of way, which occasionally they will knowingly play up to. Belief in and commitment to the company’s work, values and ensemble override them as principle concerns.

Navigating interdependent polarities or continua (individual/collective; inside/outside; means/ends; tight/loose) on a continual basis is a principal means by which these managers ‘enact’ making artwork happen, with/for particular constituencies, in an effort to ensure a sustainable future for their company and/or artform. It is crucial to their sensemaking in the midst of flux, and their readiness to “combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations” (Hernes, 2008, p. 116). Moving between these dualities is not something that needs to be *overcome* in order to do their work; it *is* their work. Furthermore, constant register-shifting (however exhausting it might be in the

longer term) is one of the things they value about the job; it is where the action and the variety lie; the domain of verbs and intersubjectivity.

When they encounter difficulty – a dualism that resists translation into a duality or a duality that flips into a dualism – (illustrated here in the scenario between Fran and Andy), they are loath to rely on formalised systems and structures, not because they (the managers) are inefficient or chaotic, but because, like Eikhof and Haunschild's (2007) theatre managers they prefer to address issues face-to-face in a personalised and context/situation-specific and values-congruent fashion. These instances rarely become overtly standardised procedures, rather, they are absorbed into 'the way we do things round here' through reflection-in-action and mindful learning, in the company of others. This means that some issues are never permanently 'resolved'; instead they are episodically massaged back from dualism to duality...until the next time.

There are certainly areas of my cases' work that belong to the "constraint" and "control" parts of creative work (budgets, timescales, production schedules etc):

...creative processes need boundaries... [and] for creative organisations they may be determined by prevailing market conditions and organisational capacity (Bilton & Leary, 2002, p. 61).

However, in other instances, this was matched not so much by a tolerance of tension, ambiguity and uncertainty, but by an active embracing of play and discrepant cues; of seeing more and seeing differently (Barry & Meisiek, 2010). In other words, they were just as capable of jumping into an unknowable and unpredictable context as they were of being thrown into it. Crucial here is the ability to say 'I don't know...but let's find out' and an appreciation that "[p]eople need to act in order to discover what they face...talk in order to discover what they think, and...feel in order to discover what it means" (Weick, 2009, pp. 266-267).

This is in sharp contrast to Bilton's observation that:

From a managerial perspective, the dissonance, disruption and counter-intuitive juxtaposition contained in the creative process are challenging. Innovation is not a comfortable project (Bilton, 2007, p. 40).

Instead these managers appear to be heeding a warning offered by David Jubb (Director, Battersea Arts Centre):

Beware of rationalists. Including yourself. Logical, sensible, well-considered trains of thought are fantastically seductive, especially because they are often right: do the sensible thing, take the path of righteousness, you know it makes sense. At key moments this is exactly the opposite of what you should do. The most important bit is looking after people and being generous with your time. I am at my best when I am helping someone else work something out. I am at my worst when I'm in danger of taking someone for granted (Tyndall, 2007, pp. 32-33).

And – as set out earlier in this discussion – far from simply supporting the creative endeavours of their company these managers went further. They were all seen to mirror, embody and enact some of the processes and strategies of theatre-making (most specifically devising) *in their own work* – particularly in their longer term collaborative planning and problem-solving – even appraising the resultant plans or documents not just in terms of fitness for purpose, but on aesthetic, sensory and emotional grounds too. These cases like working with artists; they enjoy operating “at the edge of the box” (Bilton, 2006, p. 6) alongside them, and in “mutual marginality” (Burt, 2004) with them.

The suggestion is that cultural managers' work is also very often about starting with a notion or an idea, finding connections between (apparently) unconnected threads and devising a collaborative way forward.

You introduce a lot of people to each other: artists, audiences, politicians, funders. In order to make work it's necessary to align a lot of different human desires. Find the story because it is the most powerful way to get something done...because it's the way that most of us interpret the world around us. (Jubb, quoted in Tyndall, 2007, p. 33).

In their daily doings, these managers integrate, step round, make fun of, ignore and call into question the constructed paradoxes and problems of facilitating creativity, with a fair degree of success (and it should be said, stress and overwork). And – as all my cases have been doing this for some time – that facility is so profoundly practised and absorbed they have no conscious realisation that they do it. Everything they do is relational and process-orientated. This is not cultural management; it is cultural *managing*.



## ***IX. Taking an art-full approach to resilience***

As previously noted, my cases were committed to ensuring a sustainable future for their company and/or artform: (KK described THB as an ‘agent’ rather than an ‘agency’ and regarded the closing of the organisation at some point in the future as an indicator of their success in embedding theatre into the cultural infrastructure of the city).

Such a commitment reinforces their sense of moving *to*, so as well as being firmly situated in the present and the company’s ongoing work, they were equally orientated towards the future and the longer term.

The previous eight propositions give some indication of the complex activities and transactions these managers undertake to operate in both timeframes, but how do they square with current thinking on ‘resilience’?

As set out in the literature review, the notion of resilience has now entered the cultural management lexicon with renewed urgency in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 and the ongoing UK recession and squeeze on public sector expenditure. Robinson, in an essay for the Arts Council, talks of “adaptive resilience” as “the capacity to remain productive and true to core purpose and identity whilst absorbing disturbance and adapting with integrity in response to changing circumstances” (2010, p. 14). Significantly (for this study), he notes that “disturbance does not [always] come in the form of trouble or bad news”, in other words, it could equally well come in the form of a hit show, a new building, a new and exciting avenue of work. He proposes “the adaptive cycle” (Gunderson, Holling & Light, 1995) as a system to explain how most organisations move over time through four (interlinked) phases of growth, consolidation, release and reorganisation in order to build sustained organisational effectiveness.

Of particular interest to this research is Robinson’s extension of this model to cycles of different scales of operation (“nested systems”), so that “new arts practice might move from individual artists and small, arguably marginal [sic], organisations to influence what seem to be monolithic national institutions, and then influence the whole system afresh” while at the same time, long standing companies can provide a “stable platform” to support those new artform

developments. (It is interesting to note in passing that this same trajectory does not seem to apply to new *arts management* practices).

Like Leicester (2007), Robinson is clear that his paper is about “providing images, simplifications and hypotheses” about resilience and so translating them into the ‘daily doings’ of managers in cultural organisations is not really the intention.

Other writers, however, attempt to bridge the gap by focusing on the role of the promoter or producer, or by identifying “the competencies, qualities and attributes [CQAs] which will enable creative practitioners and organisations to thrive in the challenging environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (Dods & Andrews, 2010).

In *Thriving in an Uncertain World*, Foster (2010) suggests that in order to prepare for the future, an arts promoter (manager) might usefully follow these guidelines:

- Behave like an artist, not like a business: the moment is right to remake our organisations into arts organisations that navigate the business world, rather than organisations that are ‘in the art business’.
- Privilege experimentation: no matter how counterintuitive it might seem, now is the time to innovate.
- Embrace and engage with diversity: you can’t innovate and you can’t drive change unless you have diversity.
- Strategise: constantly monitor what you are doing and adjust.
- Focus on relationships: creating art – sustaining an innovative, resilient arts organisation within the changing environment is a people business. It is based on building and sustaining relationships.

Dods (2008) suggests that ‘producers’ (as portrayed in Tyndall, 2007) combine personal vision and a sense of responsibility, artistic judgement, instinctive decision-making, flexibility and clarity of purpose, and opportunism with a strong sense of direction and thus comprise one key group of (Leicester’s) 21<sup>st</sup> century people.

Dods and Andrews (2010) shift the focus from resilience to “thriving” which they define as “adapting to changing conditions in a life-friendly way to people and planet in order to maintain the function of making great work happen”. Their

research identified and tested 78 competencies – ways of being and doing that they argue enable a significantly higher tolerance for and management of complexity, uncertainty and not-knowing – developed from a review of relevant literature.

From interviews and an online survey with arts and cultural workers (the majority being female cultural managers of a comparable age to my cases), they ascertained that relative strengths were:

- pattern recognition and making connections between things;
- motivating oneself and using one's initiative;
- appreciating the value of diversity (to include being open to new perspectives and ideas, playing with ideas, and thinking and doing things differently);
- passion and commitment (leading to very long work hours).

Conversely, relative weaknesses were identified as:

- handling conflict; challenging other in supportive ways; drawing own boundaries and rules of engagement;
- coping with ambiguity; working with emergent strategy; spontaneous decision-making ; working at level of details;
- telling compelling stories;
- taking time to reflect;
- reaching win-win solutions with others;
- helping others feel comfortable with change;
- actively caring for nature and the environment;
- communicating effectively with web 2.0/social media;
- knowing when to move on.

Most significantly, perhaps, the most important issue seemed to be people having the self-confidence to use their CQAs at work.

The first eight propositions in this study encompass those four CGAs characterised as strengths. In addition, my cases did *not* present as weak in “coping with ambiguity and working with emergent strategy”, “reaching win-win solutions” and “helping others feel comfortable with change” (in terms of longer term planning and problem-solving) or “telling compelling stories”. Handling conflict, and taking time to reflect (*on* rather than *in* action), however, were

similarly recognised as areas of difficulty by my managers *and* those questioned in Dods and Andrews' survey. The final three most common 'weaknesses' on their list did not specifically emerge from my data or analysis.

Dods and Andrews are not alone in "trying to understand this messy world and the competencies that it takes to function at an individual level through change and uncertainty" (2010, p. 6). They also do so in a way that is sympathetic to the particular pressures faced by those working in the cultural sector and the need to advocate for work practices that will enable people and organisations to thrive without "too high a cost to oneself, [or] to other people..." (p. 13).

There are nevertheless problems with a competency-based approach. It almost inevitably fragments 'managing' rather than representing it as an integrated whole; the generic nature of competencies (the cultural sector may be comparatively small, but it is very diverse) tends to assume a common set of desirable capabilities regardless of the nature of the situation, task or individuals involved. Furthermore, the broad-brush picture it paints almost inevitably excludes more subtle qualities, interactions and situational factors; and there is the risk that it could result in a mechanistic (or recipe-based) approach to education and training (Bolden & Gosling, 2006, p. 150). Thus, competency frameworks can "tend to reinforce individualistic practices that dissociate leaders from the relational environment in which they operate..." (p. 159).

From a more process-orientated (and relational) perspective, Weick (1993) identifies four "sources of resilience" in organisations, with resilience described as "processes that recover from setbacks" (2009, p. 102). The first is "improvisation and bricolage", by which he means remaining creative under pressure ("figur[ing] out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you currently think" (Bruner, 1983, p. 183, as cited in Weick, 1993, p. 639) and proceeding to create order out of whatever materials are at hand. The second is "virtual role systems", an allusion to flexibility within teams of people and the ability to imagine and build on what others might be able to do in a particular situation. The third is an "attitude of wisdom", which he characterises as "simultaneous doubt and belief" in the face of changing circumstances (Weick, 2009, p. 262). The fourth is "respectful interaction" on a face-to-face basis, which, as an alternative to routine, he sees as the core of organising.

Finally, and in anticipating only increased uncertainty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Weick (2009) makes a further plea in support of “I don’t know” as a truthful and non-stereotypical response; for holding a diagnosis lightly; dropping rationality in favour of lighter activities (awareness of the moment, active listening...); and recognising that “knowledge is not something people possess in their heads but rather something people do together” (pp. 265-270).

So far, so plausible in respect of my cases...and yet, there is still something of the “ineffable ground” which is not quite captured in the “highlighted figure” above (Weick, 2010b, p. 102).

First, there is Weick’s continued emphasis on resilience as crisis aversion, uncertainty as invariably destabilising and unwelcome, and mitigation of the worst as the best one can hope for.

To focus on resilience is to acknowledge that surprises will occur that are not of your own making, that unintended consequences will always occur, that nothing stays the same, and that pleasant experiences are short lived (Weick, 2009, p. 102).

In short, it is all remarkably joyless. Yes, my cases have to contend with sudden and ongoing problems of resourcing, and discontinuous change is affecting all aspects of the creation, production, marketing, distribution and reception of those symbolic goods we classify as art. These things do get thrown up in ways that feel destabilising and harmful. However, Weick’s “commitment to resilience” does not adequately capture the equally strong sense of energetic *agency* exhibited by my cases, their enjoyment of new (and therefore uncertain) opportunities and connections, their desire to keep on making things of creative value happen in good company. Nor does it reflect their deliberate seeking out of ways to challenge the status quo, to disrupt established practices, to interrupt the way we have always done things around here, in a broader arts and managerial sense.

Furthermore, Weick’s focus on recovering from setbacks through improvisation and bricolage – while entirely plausible in situations like crises, which are “driven by spontaneity and actions...in limited time and space” (Hernes, 2008, p. 124) – does not quite dovetail with my cases’ doings over longer/larger time-spaces. This they did not accomplish simply through serial or gradually refined

improvisations or assemblages. As noted earlier, their approach had much more in common with devising (processes and strategies which can *include* improvisation, not as performance but as a generator of material) and montage (which goes beyond the practical and pragmatic to involve an aesthetic and sensory dimension as well).

Surely resilience, like devising for theatre, is made up of complex, contextual and constitutive *processes* which are as much to do with the “personal, emotional and sensual” as the “pragmatic, logistical and concrete” (Harradine & Berndt, 2011, p. ii)? Both are about the interplay between nouns and verbs, gerunds qualified by adjectives and adverbs, and enactment writ large:

Because that *is* the nature of devising: a concrete idea *and* a leap of faith; an understanding *and* a feeling; a tried and tested process *and* a departure into the unknown; a specific activity in a particular place at a particular time *and* a moment in an ongoing body of work. Devising is always a frantic pause in an ongoing creative practice, in which we say, “For now, let’s look at this. Let’s do this. Let’s see if we can make *this*” (p. ii, italics in original).

Importantly, the ‘this’ is something no-one *has* to do (there are no lives at stake here) and yet those who do it feel compelled to. And making, mediating and disseminating the ‘this’ (as something familiar *and* new) is not solely confined to the artists working in the rehearsal studio. Others in the company – including those designated as managers – contribute in various combinations, at different stages. And it is not all neat and tidy or unalloyed pleasure either, as encapsulated in this diary entry by David Harradine, Artistic Director of Fevered Sleep, during the making of *Invisible Things*:

April 2008

We start rehearsals. Devising, playing, remembering, forgetting, meeting, looking at budgets, meeting, talking. What are we doing here? Devising. Too much material. Improvising. Photograph everything. More notebooks, filling up. Too many directions. Exquisite images. Try it this way. I don’t like it. Try it this way. It doesn’t work. Joy when something works. Stop devising. Start to make a structure. Continue devising. Confusion. Make a decision. We’re going to do this. We try it. It doesn’t work. Confusion.

Despair. Meetings with press. Filming for TV. What are we doing here?  
Talk about the piece before the piece exists. Intolerable pressure.  
Moments of extreme beauty. Moments of bliss. Sleepless nights. Crying in  
the street. Laughter, yoga, ball games. Too much material. Make a list.  
Make a diagram. Try it like this. No, like this. Maybe. Like this.

What am I doing here? Just do it. Do it like this (Harradine & Berndt, 2011,  
p. x).

Underlying this (again, rhetorical) entry is a combination of dreams and desires  
*and* risks and dangers (for example of “failing to find a place in which you can  
meet with the other people you’re working with, or with an audience”). And yet  
when the work does emerge, it can be – and those involved want it to be – a  
“narrative of pleasure, as surprising as a gift” (p. 21).

This emphasis on a positive capacity – with others – to “realize something in the  
world” (O’Hara & Leicester, 2012, p. 121) that does not already exist, was  
equally strong among my cases. This, for them, was an important – resilience  
orientated – counterweight to the crises, the overwork and the boredom of  
routine: in other words, high reliability organising infused with and qualified by  
art-fully orientated adjectives, adverbs and actions. This was ultimately what  
enabled them to recover from setbacks and keep going.

It all comes back to the work, values and ensemble. And in times of turbulence  
and insecurity in the arts, perhaps relying *solely* on external models for  
reassurance and legitimacy is not quite enough. As Matarasso suggests (2010,  
p. 7):

More than ever, perhaps, the arts need confidence in their own methods  
and processes and their own epistemology.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 5**

At the start of this thesis, I set out why it felt important to examine what cultural  
managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations through a process-orientated  
and specifically sensemaking perspective. My research questions were:

- What do cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations in the  
South West of England?

- Why do they do what they do?
- How do they do what they do?
- In what ways, might analysis of what they do inform prevailing talk about cultural management?
- To what other theoretical conversations might this analysis contribute?

I used a review of relevant literature to inform my ethnographic fieldwork which was conducted through three case studies. Through inductive, deductive and abductive analysis and discussion, I arrived at the following propositions about the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of their day-to-day activities:

I Cultural managers in micro-scale theatre companies make particular kinds of theatre-based work happen with/for particular constituencies, and seek to ensure a sustainable future for their company and/or art form.

They do this by:

- II placing 'the work', 'company values' and 'the ensemble' at the centre of their daily doings, their participation in leading, and their professional sense of identity;
- III constantly and seamlessly shifting register – (individual/collective; inside/outside; means/ends; tight/loose);
- IV exercising 'flexible' mindfulness and a high tolerance (indeed enjoyment) of ambiguity, uncertainty and equivocality;
- V using communication and personalisation as a proxy for formal structures, rules and guidelines and to build and sustain good relationships (internally and externally);
- VI taking a collaborative and devised approach to direction making, paying attention to cognitive, embodied and aesthetic dimensions;
- VII emphasising and enacting 'knowing how', through which they build 'knowing that';
- VIII blurring, ignoring or collapsing the arts/management and culture/commerce divides;
- IX taking an art-full approach to resilience.

The 'what', 'why' and 'how' of these propositions are brought together in more narrative form, as follows.



What these cultural managers do is make particular kinds of theatre-based work happen with others, and work towards a sustainable future for their organisation or art form (the 'what'). In this, they are fuelled by a commitment to the 'power' of theatre, associated value dimensions (e.g. pro-social, artistic, achievement) and ensemble-working (the 'why'). These commitments 'play out' and are reflected back in to their being and doing of leadership and their sense of identity.

The 'how' of what they do is encapsulated in a number of identifiable doings and inter-actions. They engage in continuous action and movement between different interdependent polarities (e.g. external/internal, means/ends) to spot and act on opportunities, gaps and threats and to keep the momentum going. In so doing, they oscillate between realities expressed as verbs (action) and realities expressed as nouns (stable bases), with a flexible 'mindfulness' that involves 'seeing more' (paying close attention) and 'seeing differently' (being open to novel distinctions and opportunities). They are inveterate story-tellers and sharers, both within the organisation and with multiple external stakeholders outside it.

Through constant interaction, they reinforce the 'what' and 'why' of their company, seeking contingent solutions to discrepant moments in personalised and contextualised ways: good relationships are of paramount importance. They take a devised, collaborative and iterative approach to the future direction of the company using strategies and processes which are strikingly similar to those used in devised theatre-making itself. They appraise the results of direction-making in terms of aesthetics (felt meaning, connectedness, enjoyment), as well as efficiency and effectiveness. They value informality in their learning and the acquisition of skills, knowledge and approaches primarily through experience – in a "theory imbricated with practice" (praxis) kind of way. They like finding out what they think, by seeing what they say in the company of others, and they would like to do more of it.

While aware of the constructed dualisms between art and management and culture and commerce, they tend to blur, collapse or ignore such boundaries in their day to day work, demonstrating a very high tolerance and (frequently) enjoyment of ambiguity, uncertainty and equivocality as a key element of their habitus. Everything they do is relational and process-orientated, betraying an

energetic agency, an appreciation of the surprising, different, exciting and counter-cultural, and a desire to keep on making things of creative value *happen* in and for good company. All of this provides an art-full and resilience-orientated counterweight to stress, crises, overwork, and the boredom of routine. The importance of the work, company values and ensemble is never far away.

Thus, while these managers' job descriptions (however out of date) outlined their functions and responsibilities (planning, people management, production/touring, promotion, finance and fundraising), the propositions above suggest activities (Watson, 2001) and links between activities, which are far more reflective, textured and nuanced than these functions alone could convey. Moreover the propositions shape-shift from 'why' to 'what' to 'how' and back again, thus giving a glimpse of the *integrated* ways in which these managers move between different registers and types of activity, with a future orientation firmly in mind. Most significantly of all, perhaps, there is little here that surprised my cases: this account seemed to make sense in a 'knowing what we think by seeing what she says' manner, with the 'she' being enough of a 'we' to be a credible interlocutor.

What, then, do these findings add up to? How might they inform prevailing talk about cultural management? And to what other theoretical conversations might this analysis contribute? These questions provide the focus of the concluding chapter.

# Chapter 6: Conclusion

## Introduction

The conclusions of this thesis are grouped under four broad headings for ease of navigation. They are:

- cultural managing;
- sensemaking, adverbs and adjectives;
- theatre making and managing; and
- learning from organising in theatre.

Needless to say, all four ‘topics’ mix, merge and interrelate, as has been the pattern throughout my analysis and discussion chapters. Between them, they set out the contribution of this thesis and what is known differently as a result.

### 6.1 Cultural managing

Taken together, the nine propositions put forward in the previous chapter signify a move away from a “systems-control” paradigm “based on the belief that successful management [is] essentially a matter of drawing up the right blueprints, plans, strategies, structures, rules and procedures and putting them in place” (Watson, 2002, p. 75), which still pervades much cultural management literature and funding body thinking.

The emphasis in this research has been on cultural *managing* (rather than *management*) and *organising* (rather than *organisation*), on *processes* rather than *stable entities*.

The verbs and gerunds (Gioia, 2006, p. 1711) of the propositions emphasise not just the busy-ness and constant register-shifting of my managers’ day to day work, but also the business and essential ongoing-ness of it.

Interweaving the “flux and hunches” of organising (Hernes, 2008, p. 120), however, are nouns or “more stable constellations” (p. 117) – the work, values and ensemble – which in turn influence and are influenced by continual organising, and the new and evolving creative processes, products and strategies of my cases’ organisations. And here, ‘organisation’ is not used to denote a ‘thing’ that is separate and ‘out there’, but rather “work arrangements involving relationships, understandings and processes in which people

are...engaged, to complete tasks undertaken in the organisation's name”  
(Watson, 2002, p. 59).

This particular mind-set or way of thinking about cultural management offers some new ways of intervening in the prevailing cultural management conversation – the latter being characterised by notions of divide/dualism and deficit; the comparative invisibility of the small scale in empirical research; and a tendency to set out what cultural managers *should* do (often in very abstract terms) without necessarily examining what they *already* do, particularly within what are very variable arts contexts and organisational settings.

Rather, in this study, cultural management has been constructed as the *processes* that make up organising and managing in theatre-based work and the constantly changing *relationships* that such work entails. At the same time, it highlights the purposive quality of the endeavour, which, as set out in the first and second propositions, has a crucial bearing on the cases' being and doing of leadership, their sense of who they are as cultural managers and, as set out in the last, their approach to resilience in the subsidised arts.

Viewed through this perspective, these cultural managers are far removed from the deficient also-rans who must hang on to the coat-tails of the corporate world (or large scale subsidised cultural institutions) in order to acquire 'proper' business skills and management techniques. As such, these research findings add further substance to the growing body of empirical work that paints a more complex picture of what might constitute expertise in the sector, where it might be located (particularly in terms of scale) and how it might be enacted.

In addition, the nine propositions add a significant 'how' element to the 'what' branch of empirical enquiry in the cultural management field, helping to shine an empirically focused spotlight on hitherto unseen or under-explored activities and interventions. It is the 'how' which captures the experience, values and traditions of the cultural managers profiled here, and which demonstrates the closeness of their relationship with the people, arts processes and products of their organisations (explored further below). It is the 'how' which highlights that relationship challenges go with the territory: rather than constituting problems that are susceptible (or not) to a once-and-for-all-solution. Such challenges are all part of organising, of which informality and personalisation of ways forward form an important part. It is the 'how' which begs questions about the best ways

of configuring and delivering high quality curriculum content, teaching and learning, in a field where informal and non-formal 'knowing how' is crucially valued. Finally, it is the 'how' through which they display the 'knowing how' of what they do.

In short, this process orientated reframing highlights intertwined elements of cultural *managing* that have been ignored or underemphasised in the literature on cultural *management*.

It is important to retain a sense of perspective about this contribution, however, and here there is a parallel with Pye (2005, p. 33) – only this time substituting 'cultural management' and 'cultural managing' for 'leadership' and 'leading':

...such reframing will never replace [cultural management] as a topic of interest, but will at least encourage a more informed appreciation of the daily *doing* of [cultural managing], grounded in organizing, just as it is in everyday life.

This study is, I hope, "a small act of creative [and theoretical] transgression" (Leicester, 2010, pp. 20-21), something that "calls forth something already existing but hidden in the dominant culture", thus intervening in the field's current "economy of meaning". The use of the word 'small' here should not be mistaken for diffidence or hesitancy. Such small acts can be powerful precisely *because* they run alongside and challenge the norm in creative and counter-cultural ways – just as many small/micro-scale theatre companies do in and through their work. It is in this sense that this thesis adds a further voice (or more properly voices) and an "adjusted focus" (Fitzgibbon, 2001) to the cultural management conversation.

And such an emphasis on 'small' may also be timely. Leadbeater (2009), using the analogy of boulders and pebbles, posits that in the not-too-distant future, although the large boulders (traditional providers of most of our information, entertainment and culture) will still be visible on the beach, they will have been drowned by a rising tide of pebbles i.e. small, fluid, initiative or project-based coalitions of people gathered round myriad ideas and forms of content (Summerton & Kay, 1999, p. 6). Paying empirical and appreciative attention now to how such tiny groupings organise – as this research has done in respect of individuals dedicated to three such pebbles – may reap benefits in the future.

The tide is turning, and simply extrapolating from the large to the small will not do anymore. As Gladwell (2013, p. 6) writes of David and Goliath:

...the fact of being an underdog [David] can *change* people in ways we often fail to appreciate: it can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable (italics in original).

In respect of cultural management discourse, then, this research:

- reveals a very strong sense of vocation behind what cultural managers do;
- suggests that the what, why and how of their daily activities are necessarily intertwined, with each strand informing and being informed by the others;
- represents a significant shift away from the systems control model which still informs how cultural management is taught and written about; shows that a focus on cultural *managing* rather than cultural *management* can highlight facets hitherto under-emphasised or ignored in the literature; and offers an analytical lens for future use in exploring organisation and management in other domains of the cultural sector;
- raises questions about scale and the location of expertise in cultural organisations by lifting the profile of the small;
- gives an indication of how cultural managers draw on their own traditions and thus calls into question the deficit view of what they do;
- suggests that recognition of dualisms in theory is translated into interdependent dualities in practice;
- suggests that certain difficulties and tensions go with the territory and they are part of the job, not a problem that is susceptible to a once and for all solution: it's all part of organising, of which personalisation forms an important part;
- gives food for thought both for curriculum development and delivery in higher education and continuing professional development programmes in cultural management.

## **6.2 Sensemaking: adjectives and adverbs**

Sensemaking has pervaded this study in ontological, epistemological and methodological ways. The intention was to make social constructionist sense of

what cultural managers do, by delving into their day to day processes, doings and relationships, and seeing and hearing what they say about what they do. Weick's sensemaking perspective has provided me with both the exhortation and the means to "drop [my] tools", the better to enable me to "[see] things that fall outside the 'organization' imagery because our [established] imageries and methodological tools do not allow us to see them, much less explain them" (Hernes, 2008, p. 114). It has legitimised an explicit focus on what Weick calls "mundane poetics" (2009, p. 9), with "mundane" signalling ordinary, everyday organising and "poetics" emphasising "the *creation* of viable realities from equivocal circumstances" (Gioia, 2007, p. 287, as cited in Weick, 2009, p. 10, italics added) on an ongoing basis. It has enabled me to convey something of an "ineffable practice" by "drawing attention to smaller, effable, abridged episodes" and through "gerund forms of thinking...recover some of the process that generates nouns and gives us apparent stability... [whilst recognising that] nouns and verbs are best seen as co-evolving" (Weick, 2010, p. 102). There were nevertheless points in my analysis and discussion where the comfortable match – as outlined above – became interrupted, or formed a less comfortable 'fit', and it is here that a contribution to the sensemaking literature began to emerge, most notably in relation to uncertainty, High Reliability Organisations, mindfulness, improvisation, and the 'space between' nouns and verbs.

Though not managing high reliability organisations (HROs) in the sense that their errors could incur actual loss of life (Weick, 2007, p. 18), the cases did echo high reliability organis<sup>ing</sup> in their daily activities. They were constantly and exhaustively alert and on the lookout, tracking events as they unfolded. They were reluctant to simplify, preferring to explore issues from several angles, accepting that the 'stability' of any situation (e.g. funding) was precarious, the world in which they operated (small-scale subsidised theatre) was unstable and unpredictable and the longer term future of their organisations was far from certain. They shuttled between the big picture and the operational on an ongoing basis, negotiating, initiating and responding to changes as they went along.

They demonstrated resilience ("processes that recover from setbacks" Weick, 2009, p. 102) by combining doubt and scepticism with an unassailable belief in their company's work, values and ensemble; by improvising and engaging in

bricolage (in the sense of using what they knew, to go beyond what they already thought); by welcoming, eliciting and building on other people's ideas; and by placing a premium on good face-to-face interaction as a way of generating a sufficiency of shared meaning. Finally, they drew on and supported specialist and front-line expertise, to ensure that ways forward were challenged and owned as they evolved. In these ways, my cases exercised mindfulness (as Weick depicts it, 2007, pp. 41-42) by continually paying attention to and noticing the unexpected in the making.

This mindful, high reliability organising worked in almost textbook fashion when my cases were on the look-out for problems; when a hazard looked like it was going to become an active risk; when they needed to avert an impending crisis: in other words, when they perceived the unexpected as a threat or a potential catastrophe; damage needed to be mitigated; and reliable performance restored.

When they saw uncertainty as an opportunity, however (e.g. a new project idea) or when direction making (e.g. formulating a capital bid) their organising assumed a noticeably different quality, pace, tone and demeanour. Here, they needed no encouragement to "drop their tools" (Weick, 2009, p. 268); their mindfulness took on a playful orientation which encouraged distraction and context-shifting, such that seeing more *and* seeing differently were somehow combined as part of the process. In these circumstances they actively embraced discrepant cues and encouraged safe emergencies in order to broaden and extend the range of possible ways forward. In other words, they treated some situations of uncertainty, unpredictability and equivocality as a *resource* rather than something to be defused. Here, a predisposition to help realise something of value in the world in good company, seemed necessarily to override any preoccupation with failure, with far from detrimental outcomes. This, then, is high reliability organising that is not solely about constraining errors-in-the-making, it is about enabling positive advances too.

In these instances their repertoire extended beyond improvisation and bricolage and moved closer to devising (which, as noted, in theatre making comprises processes and strategies that can *include* improvisation as a generator of material) and montage (which unlike bricolage, goes *beyond* the practical and pragmatic to involve aesthetic and sensory dimensions as well). In other words



these areas of work – which were neither routine nor crisis – were not accomplished through serial or gradually refined improvisations or assemblages, they were devised over time through particular overlapping and iterative stages, with the results judged not only in terms of the rational, logistical and concrete, but also according to emotion, and “what works” in an embodied and aesthetic sense.

This is perhaps not surprising. These managers were clearly not fighting fires or saving lives (at least in any literal sense): they were channelling their energies – along with others – towards the creation, production and presentation of symbolic goods of a particular kind, which they regarded as *life-enhancing*. They were not only on the look-out for issues that could become crises; they were also seeking out opportunities to make creative work happen and be sustained, work that itself is mired in uncertainty, and in terms of outcome, is often about interrupting familiar sensemaking resources, creating doubt, and exploring new and different ways of seeing. It is perfectly plausible – arguably, inevitable – that context, culture, size/scale, espoused values, and the nature of an organisation’s work (i.e. the *habitus*) should have a bearing on sensemaking approaches, patterns and activities, and vice versa. And it is precisely this contextually sensitive application of a sensemaking perspective to the daily doings of these cultural managers that has enabled me to see aspects of sensemaking in a different light.

It is suggested that an opportunity (the idea of making something of perceived value happen) is a different class of “content” (Weick, 2009, p. 267) to a threat, and implies a concomitant variation in the tenor and range of responses. Thus in direction making, the trio of equivocality, uncertainty and unpredictability – ‘holding contradictory thoughts in your head’, as one case said – can have a positive – even essential – role to play, as part of the mix. Paying mindful attention to the possibility of error was matched by a need to give way to mindful distraction, context shifting and de-familiarisation (Barry & Meisiek, 2010, p. 2) in order to generate and bottom out creative possibilities. It is argued (as the cases’ activities bear out) that both classes of content come under the banner of high reliability organising – just not necessarily with the same emphasis, pace and inflection. One size does not fit all.

Similarly, the cases' recourse to devising-inflected activity (overlapping processes and strategies of preparation, creative origination, creative organisation, manifestation/presentation, reflection/renewal) suggests a *modus operandi* in addition to organising as "running through a script" or an "instance of improvisation" (Mangham & Pye, 1991, p. 26). In an epistemological (rather than metaphorical) sense, devising enabled my cases to pursue important and non-urgent concerns (so neither routine, nor crisis), collaboratively and iteratively over time.

Another way of expressing this is to say that successful sensemaking needs to take into account not only verbs and nouns, but also adjectives and adverbs. If verbs "capture the action that lays down the path for sensemaking" (Weick, 1995, p. 188), and "nouns form more stable bases for processes [which interact] with the more fluid and emergent" (Hernes, 2008, p. 122), then the modification of those nouns and verbs by adjectives and adverbs (to denote feelings, moods, attitudes, beliefs, desires, expectations, knowledge, abilities and patterns of learned behaviour) has a significant impact on the manner and substance of the 'what', 'why' and 'how' that takes place in between.

I have used a sensemaking perspective as an investigative noun: a (relatively) stable constellation around and through which I organised my research with curiosity and a desire to make something out of it. My subsequent actions or verbs of a fluid and emergent kind – observing, analysing, discussing, even devising with others – enabled me not only to theorise 'what cultural managers do', but also to wind those actions back into slower motion again as a slightly altered sensemaking noun, or perspective. I think of neither in the same way as I did at the outset.

In respect of sensemaking, then, this research:

- takes discussion of the unexpected a stage further;
- suggests that successful sensemaking is far from indifferent to 'content' and is inextricably bound up with context/ habitus (i.e. goes beyond the immediate situation);
- explores the possibility that high reliability organising, mindfulness and notions of resilience may be differently inflected when enacted outside routine or crisis situations, where opportunities and important and non-

urgent considerations require agency of a purposive, broader-based, playful and creative kind;

- adds a further dimension to notions of ‘improvisation’ through the addition of ‘devising’ as a collaborative sensemaking and sensegiving process;
- suggests that adjectives and adverbs might usefully join the sensemaking lexicon of verbs and nouns;
- provides an empirical account of ‘flexible mindfulness’ in action, thus adding further support to the literature that has begun to explore it;
- brings arts organisations into the sensemaking arena – *in their own right* (i.e. operating with specific dynamics and a distinctive history) rather than – albeit with the best of intentions – to pep up analogies with other non-arts organisations.

### 6.3 Theatre making and managing

In theatre/performance studies, scholars and practitioners articulate a very clear separation or divide between the creative team and the administrative team, with the latter mentioned (if at all) within the context of funding, legal matters (e.g. permissions) and logistics. Similarly some notable cultural management scholars are very clear that management is quite separate from art.

The cases were certainly aware of the long-established dualism in the arts between “creatives” and “suits” (Bilton, 2007) and yet, as set out in proposition eight, they responded by playing up to the stereotype or ignoring it. Further than that, they neutralised several constructed dualisms (e.g. culture and commerce) by treating them as it-goes-without-saying interdependent dualities, which they navigated on a day to day basis through constant register-shifting (proposition three). As set out above, moving between such dualities was not something they needed to *overcome* in order to do their work; it *was* their work.

There are also striking parallels in theatre practitioners’ and cultural managers’ preferences for informality and the importance of learning through doing, talking and observing and working alongside others (“knowing that”). Both areas of work are highly verbal; ideas are generated, explored and expressed through questions, explanations, and jokes – which often occur over lunch or in the context of a chat about something else (McAuley, 1998). In both, the anecdote is the principal means by which expertise and ‘theory’ are articulated and

communicated between individuals and groups (p. 76) and notions of “what works” were similarly appraised on embodied, aesthetic and cognitive grounds.

In a very pragmatic sense, the findings also raise questions about who is inside and who is outside the meaning making processes of theatre-based work.

Again, as McAuley notes, many important decisions which have a significant bearing on the creative outcome (e.g. casting, touring decisions, securing of funding) “could all legitimately be seen as part of the rehearsal process” (p. 79).

Similarly, the view presented in this study (as exemplified by the cases) is of a much more broad-based and holistic view of “ensemble” – a repository for shared meaning, values and a collaborative ethos, rather than a synonym for the “creative team” – which not only *allows* for role and activity boundaries across the company to be porous, but actively *requires* it. These companies are heavily reliant on inter-actions, being micro-scale and operating within tight timeframes, with low and far from secure levels of resourcing. And the cultural manager, in each, takes very seriously her responsibility for ensuring the company’s sustainable future, safeguarding core values internally and externally, and advocating the artistic work.

This study goes further, however, to suggest that not only is theatre work at the core of the ‘why’ of these managers’ work, but that in a more isomorphic and epistemological sense, theatre processes and strategies (most notably devising) infuse and inflect the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ as well, particularly when they themselves are ‘making work’ with others – in the sense of future planning, reports, funding applications and so on.

This does not equate with saying that what cultural managers do *is* art or is *like* art. What is suggested is that the art-fullness they display is entirely plausible given the habitus of the companies of which they form part, and which is then reinforced and enacted in both the substance and manner of their doings. In fact, when this was shared with the cases, they spoke in terms of ‘working with artists helps blur the lines’ (KK); ‘there must be some kind of subconscious soaking in...’ (AU); and it is an ‘inevitable consequence of working your way in to someone else’s creativity’ (SS).

The research therefore raises doubts about the robustness of the perceived divide between artists and managers, *particularly* in micro-scale theatre

companies. It begs questions about the ways in which that divide in general and cultural management in particular is framed and depicted in the theatre/performance studies literature. By implication it also draws attention to identifiable and hitherto 'no go' areas between academic discourses in cultural management and theatre/performance studies. As touched on earlier, models and frames that address issues of audience are very different in each field; cross-over is rare (Freshwater, 2009); and yet a series of judicious, *critical* encounters might lead to new insights for both. There might be real benefits for higher education and practice if both fields were to consider more substantive excursions from what can seem like essentialist, exceptionalist and ring-fenced subject areas, in order, creatively, to explore something more of the spaces in-between.

In respect of theatre-making and managing, then, this research:

- questions the traditional or habitual divide between creatives on the one hand and suits on the other: such a construction is less evident and easy to sustain in day to day work, particularly in micro-scale enterprises;
- suggests that in an isomorphic sense, theatre processes and strategies influence and inflect cultural managers' doings in those settings;
- raises questions about who is inside and outside the process of making theatre work, and suggests a more holistic view of ensemble than is the case in theatre/performance studies literature;
- wonders about the possible benefits that may accrue from exploring the blank space between cultural management and theatre/performance studies discourses (e.g. audience) and the wisdom – as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century – of persisting with ring-fenced subject areas. Some border-crossing, particularly at undergraduate level might reap real dividends in the academic and professional spheres.

#### **6.4 Learning from organising in theatre**

As set out in the literature review, aspects of 'the art of' in organisation and management studies have proven both intriguing and problematic for this enquiry. Issues include the partial and largely uncritical adoption – even appropriation – of theatre concepts, metaphors and practices; contextually specific application to the corporate sector; and the comparative invisibility – in

the literature – of cultural organisations as a whole, and cultural managers in particular. This has nevertheless prompted questions about what this study of cultural managers might *offer* ‘the art of...’ field, not least because such professionals inhabit, navigate and mediate the space between arts, management and organisation on a daily basis.

If one compares this research with some recent portraits of the “organisational artist” or “artful leader”, a further – and unexpected – concluding observation can be drawn.

Barry (2008, pp. 39-40) writes of the “organizational artist” as someone who

...wants to create more lifeful outcomes, ones which are contextually connected to the immediate environment and the broader societal sphere. S/he will deliberately savour and extend key problems – excelling at problem finding and problem shifting, as well as problem-solving. Iterativeness and sketchy ways of holding problems and possibilities will be processual hallmarks. Creating tensional frameworks that generate containable and enjoyable surprise will be another. And play and imagination...will undoubtedly constitute one more thread.

Significantly, how these might be “woven together”, however, is something that the author maintains requires further research.

Similarly Ladkin and Taylor (2010a, p. 240), in drawing together six articles in a special edition of *Leadership*, offer the following conception of “leadership as art”

It is about creating new ways of understanding the world that embraces its inherent complexity. This includes the capacity to hold paradoxes, tensions and outright contradictions at the same time. It includes both the pleasant and unpleasant. It is grounded in direct sensory knowing and requires a highly developed aesthetic judgement. In this way it requires the capacity to enact balance, discernment, and sensitivity, both to the call of the future and to the needs of the present.

Once again, this is an abstract and aspirational portrait: “a vision for a form of leadership which might just rise to the challenges of being human in today’s world” (p. 240)

What is striking in both these examples is the synergy between such *speculative* pictures and what – according to this thesis – cultural managers *do* in micro-scale theatre organisations, as exemplified by the nine propositions. Whilst attempting to avoid seduction by rhetoric (cultural managers are neither heroic nor perfect, nor is the match with these portraits exact), these three cases are managers who are not artists and yet they work in art-full ways; they tackle problems (unpleasant) and yet they also play with opportunities (pleasant); they combine busy-ness, business and aesthetics; and they are dedicated to theatre-work that can produce “life-full”/life-enhancing outcomes, supported by congruent values and a commitment to collaborative working that is both productive and enjoyable for its own sake.

Furthermore, the particular art-fullness of these managers is manifested in ways not currently reflected in ‘the art of...’ literature. These include organising *in* theatre (rather than organising *is* or *as* theatre); devising as an epistemological frame (and an extension and challenge to metaphorical discussions around improvisation and/or script-based work); and ensemble as a value as well as a *modus operandi* (which draws attention away from the individual and more towards collaborative endeavour).

I would suggest, then, that looking to cultural managers (rather than exclusively to artists) may take ‘the art of...’ debate in a fruitful new direction.

In respect of the discourse around management and the arts, then, this research:

- suggests that there might be useful learning to be done from an examination of organising/leading/managing *in* theatre alongside existing recourse organising *is* or *as* theatre;
- constitutes an empirical (and ensemble-orientated) example of ‘the art of...’ in practice, for further consideration and critique;
- offers the cultural manager and cultural management as discrete and legitimate areas of study in ‘the art of...’ literature.

## **6.5 Limitations of the research**

What then might be the drawbacks of this research, what is missing and what might I have done differently?

The strength of the research – an in-depth focus on cultural managers (working in micro-scale theatre organisations) who are missing from or under-represented in mainstream cultural management (and theatre and organisation and management studies) literature – brings with it some book-end concerns.

In studying the doings of three female, domain-and-scale-specific managers, I did not investigate the extent to which my findings compare or contrast with the activities of *male* cultural managers; managers working in theatre organisations at *small, medium and large scale*; those managing in *other domains* of the cultural sector (visual arts and crafts, music, digital media – or indeed in museums, libraries and archives, built heritage, sport or tourism) or the *third sector* more broadly. My enquiry did not include empirical contact with those operating in the *for-profit* area of the creative and cultural industries or indeed micro-scale businesses located in *other parts of the economy*. The study therefore lacks a comparative element. That said, care must be taken to avoid thinking that these findings can *only* attain legitimacy or credibility by recourse to external benchmarks, when the whole point was to add a minority voice to majority discourse and to critique rather than merely accept dominant conventions both within and outside the (cultural) management field. The main question was ‘what do cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations’, not how do they compare with other types of managers elsewhere, although that would be a perfectly legitimate follow-up enquiry. To draw on Beirne (2012, p. 157): “It is this *situated* blending of principle and practice... that has wider applicability as a means of enlarging our sense of what is possible in managing to manage” (italics added).

There were nevertheless limitations of a different sort.

While I observed my cases as members of a culture shaping and sharing group, I did not directly involve other organisational members in the study. So – for example – I did not interview others about their relationship with the cultural manager or what they thought she did, nor did I explore the arts/management ‘divide’ from their perspective, or spend time in the rehearsal room with them. Consequently, I was unable to examine the intricacies of particular relationships, or the impact of traffic going the other way i.e. the extent to which creatives’ activities were inflected with my cases’ ways of *managing* and *organising*. It could be argued, then, that the emerging picture worked better as



a case study and less well as an ethnography. Furthermore, the detail of the relationship between cultural manager and artistic director (in the two organisations where this was the leadership structure) remains relatively unexplored.

After the analysis and discussion chapters had been written, I invited each case to meet with me to share and check out my findings to see if they 'made sense' to them. I expressed a preference for doing this individually so that I could make the reporting as personalised as possible and bring things full circle. They all accepted, we met, and through their responses and feedback (effectively a further informal interview), I was reminded of three things: first, their keenness to uncover more about their own practice; second, the acuity of their self and organisational awareness; and third, the challenge – in research – of summarising multi-faceted findings and discussion points without flattening the life out of them, or reducing them to yet another set of two-dimensional 'how to' guidelines. As Colville et al (1999, p. 134) ask: "Is it possible to simplify without being simplistic? Is it possible to translate without traducing the integrity of the ideas?"

Whatever labels we use, they are reductions in relation to the complexity of that which we study... [and yet] what is more interesting from a process perspective is how we extract and reintroduce our labels into a complex world, given that when we introduce them they become part of the world... This is the type of tangledness that managers grapple with, it is also the type of tangledness that researchers grapple with... (Hernes, 2008, p. 149).

Indeed, over time, I became increasingly aware of the parallels between what my cases were doing and the ways in which I was 'devising' a way towards my findings, with and through the fieldwork and the literature available to me. The process was not linear; rather it proceeded in cyclical fashion with surprises, dead-ends, moments when things felt wrong, right or better, and – significantly – times when I had a desperate need to work things out in a group. There were occasions when I needed to leave things to cook; when I changed my mind mid-sentence; when I wanted to include the immediacy of other writers' words rather than summarise them; when I experienced almost concurrent despair and elation, and when the shape, flow and appearance of the argument *and* the text

(deciding against single spacing for quotations, for example, because I thought them ugly) took on an obsessive importance. On reflection, while a decision to present my findings in the form of propositions (with all the positivist undertones that term implies) may have served the purpose of getting the work done, I'm not sure it quite captured the sense of emergent *repertoire* (rather than rules, recipes or prescriptions) I witnessed and wanted to convey. Perhaps a different (briefer) mode and medium is called for to "reintroduce [those] labels [back] into a complex [practitioner] world".

Finally, I must acknowledge how personally significant this work has been and yet counter any suspicion that I simply found what I set out to find, with this being an elaborate vanity project. Choosing to be located between a business school and a drama department (rather than in my home base of arts management) and thus between social sciences and the humanities, meant that I was subject to questions, perspectives and literatures that were unfamiliar and therefore testing. I was challenged on the taken-for-granted assumptions I inevitably brought with me. Selecting three cultural managers not known for their habit of taking prisoners and who (I believe) would have said if my findings did not ring true, increased rather than decreased my own desire for rigour. And realising – as time went on – that the emerging findings made different (and surprising) sense of what cultural managers do, alerted me to the importance of openness and clarity at each stage of the process. This was an unavoidably reflexive exercise: I only know what I think now I've seen what I said. It is now up to the reader to determine if the resultant story is good and plausible enough.

## **6.6 Implications for future research**

The limitations of this research, together with its strengths and findings, give pointers to future enquiry – in addition to studies that look further at the important 'variables' of gender, scale and dual leadership referred to above.

I deliberately selected cases whose organisations were *not* in crisis, and whose management was regarded as being good enough to warrant NPO status. This was to ensure that what I was observing – across all three – was of an equivalent and 'kite-marked' standard. Much of the deficit strand of cultural management literature, however, derives from and loops back into a prevailing sense of crisis across the sector. More empirical research into what micro-scale

cultural managers do (as opposed to what they should or don't do) in crisis situations – particularly from a sensemaking perspective – might yield interesting and useful insights, particularly in relation to prevailing notions of resilience.

Research which looks more closely at the history and development of management in theatre and performance studies and the possibilities for less stereotyped and more nuanced conversations with cultural management scholars and practitioners might serve further to ground the cross-over findings explored here. In addition, ethnographic enquiry into micro-scale music, visual arts and crafts, film and digital media organisations from a habitus perspective, might reveal further 'inflections' between management and art form practices.

Further study of sensemaking and high reliability organising in circumstances of opportunity rather than threat, where people actively make particular things (of value) happen, rather than solely responding to changes as they go along, might also broaden and deepen this line of enquiry.

Finally, scholarship which brings empirical cultural management research into 'the art of...' and organisational sensemaking arena may help enrich the conversation all round, with implications for theory and practice.

### **A last word...?**

This research offers a more textured, art-full and nuanced appreciation of 'what cultural managers do in micro-scale theatre organisations' which is grounded in their day to day activities, and the purpose, work and values of their organisation. With a focus on cultural *managing*, sensemaking-in-action, and processes and strategies of devising in theatre, it points the way, not only to a better understanding of cultural management, but also to a conceptual and epistemological re-framing in this emerging field, which is of relevance to practitioners and scholars alike.

The primary value of this study lies in enabling cultural managers to articulate what they do in ways that move away from notions of divide, two-dimensional difference, deficit and heroic dauntlessness, and closer to the rich and multi-dimensional weave that it is. It is hoped that this reframing (particularly as it relates to managing at the micro-scale) will inform further research, curriculum

design, and teaching and learning, helping to narrow the gap between theory and practice, and bringing the cultural management field into closer partnership with process-orientated management enquiry.

All four sections of this concluding chapter: cultural managing; sensemaking, adverbs and adjectives; theatre making and managing; and learning from organising in theatre weave a discourse around 'what cultural managers do' that is very different from the dysfunctional loop which bounded this enquiry at the start. As a result, not only does cultural management take on a novel appearance as cultural managing, but aspects of sensemaking, the intersection between arts and management and the relationship between theatre makers and managers become differently textured too (and this is precisely where interesting conversations might follow). It offers a focus on organising *in* theatre to scholars engaged in 'the art of'... field of organisation and management studies. It extends an invitation to breach some of the disciplinary boundaries between cultural management and theatre studies. It beckons further exploration, with sensemaking scholars, of how – in addition to high reliability organising to *mitigate* the worst – we also organise to *make* things of value in good company. And the more cross-over the better: dialogue is more than *sensegiving*, and *sensetaking*, it is *sensemaking* in action, with essential adjectives and adverbs.

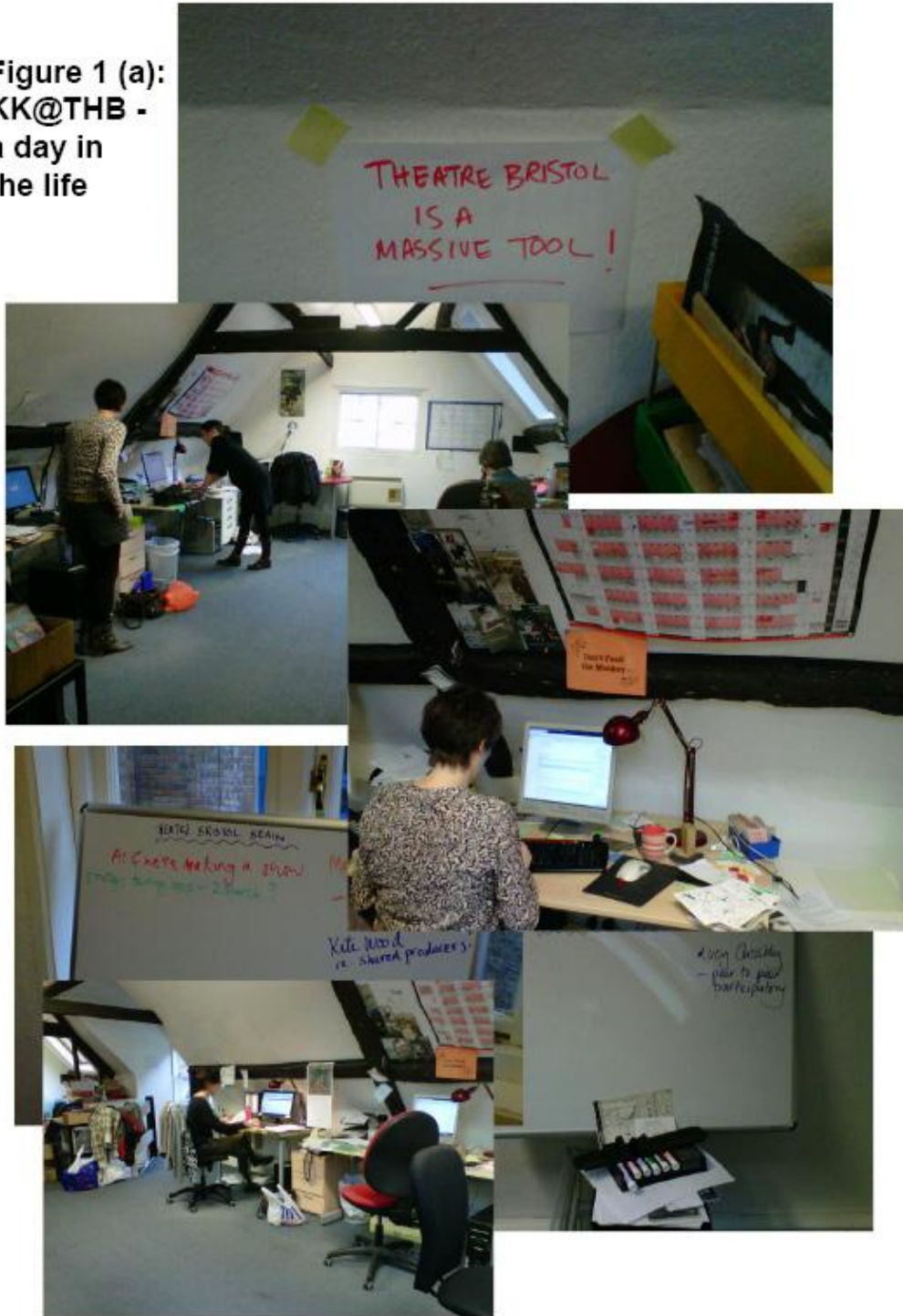
This whole exercise – for participants and researcher – has been one of talking the walk, underpinned by a belief that “those best able to walk the talk are the ones who actually talk the walking they find themselves doing most often, with most intensity, and with most satisfaction” (Weick, 1995, p. 182). How do we know what we think until we see what we say?

It has also – vitally – involved an equivalent of putting together “two guns, a pantomime horse, and a pair of curtains” and then going “somewhere you could never have predicted” (Etchells, 1998, as cited in Heddon & Milling 2006, p. 197). Let's do *this* and see what happens?

Finally, this process of theorising (like sensemaking, devising, and cultural managing) can only have a way-station ending. It is a temporary stabilising of something that is now past. If that's the story, then what shall we now do?

It is hoped that this research gives sufficient sharedness, energy and impetus for some interesting and art-full doings to follow.

Figure 1 (a):  
KK@THB -  
a day in  
the life



# Figure 1 (b); KK's to-do list job descrip to Sue

2/8/11

- 65 site apps to read.
- Board terms of reference
- Notes from Albrow meeting
- send email to Mickey
- Manifest evaluation together
- Search Party questions
- Report on young prod progress
- TSW minutes
- Top minutes
- Top charities hse
- Meeting w Pippa in Sept?
- what to do about Sngina

- Puppet Prototype
- Croon ✓ ~~lars~~
  - Amy
  - Aimee ✓ Smoking Ap

- Pick a fest - dancer
- Email budget to Janie
- Thank you letters M!
- Creative Collab fund -
- Producer's weekend -
- re-read T's voter

send to Willi

Nov - Design a workshop + set time, date + advertise

- Artist data
- Activity for NPO years
- Budget for NPO years

- Email all Edin peeps
- Edin shout out

GAA app for Jan - March

See Paintworks

Read de Spill, Le Forneau - head on Joe's email + make plan  
 one to ones w EJ, T  
 Olivia's ref notes + exit interview + EJ's

- ~~Kate~~ Patric
- re visit what I said I'd do
- Katie - re Ferment publicity
- Budget 2100 + timeline + Megan

Aga tour book + funding app.

• Kid Carpet tour + funding

• Karla - to do

me

Jo+C

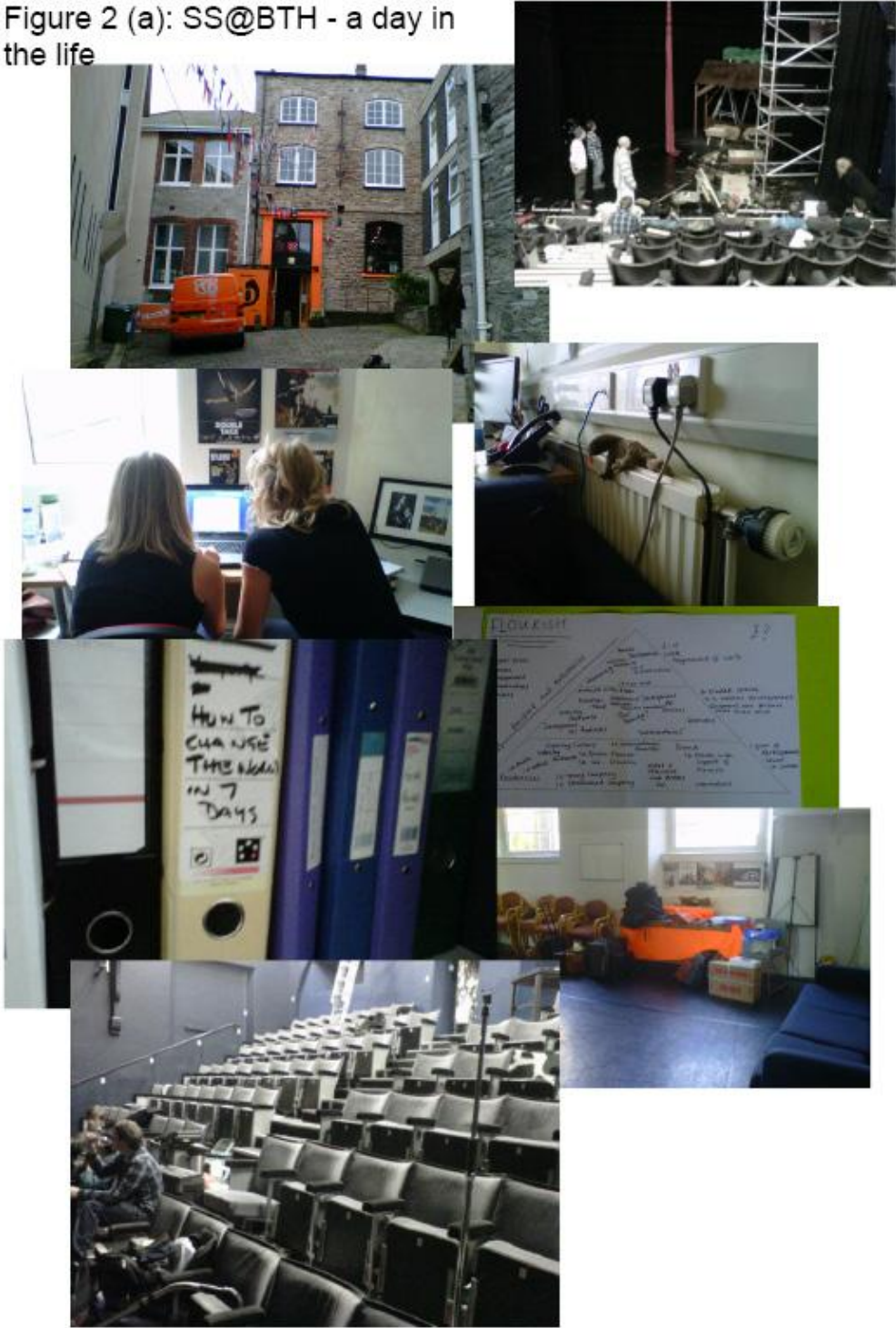
?

endorse

- Type up conference speech for site
- Talk to Clare about our website
- meet Matt Little, Emma Stenning, John Retallack
- Producers notes - reassemble my group. what else? what action?



Figure 2 (a): SS@BTH - a day in the life





## Figure 2 (b); SS's to-do list

- Mark. a. 1. 12.
- ① Trustee meeting - write report. ✓
  - ② Summer Mix ✓
  - ③ Easter holidays (close) ✓
  - ④ My absence & cover requirements. ✓
  - ⑤ Le Mart Belt de-brief with company Friday 12-00 noon. ✓
  - ⑥ Tony programme 29 Feb. ✓
  - ⑦ Wed 11/2 3-4 pm. Xmas flashback + Xmas 2012. ✓
  - ⑧ Myrtle project plan & timeline.
  - ⑨ Jane Sule (changey while here + PAT testy) ✓
  - ⑩ Financial position - auditability necessary. ✓
  - ⑪ Floral show - ✓
  - ⑫ Day of Difference. ✓
  - ⑬ FHM + AHSB + many present. ✓
  - ⑭ YMT Rtg.
  - ⑮ CRB checks
- SS. 10. 1. 12

- ① YMT UK invoice
- ② COM for extraordinary meeting at future of CO. DATE E-MAIL.
- ③ Capital work: Cindy D, Hannah Ridd, Patrick Lewis + SS + AT. ✓

Patrick Lewis

ERDF

Revenue support as separate project -

Les Roper - maximum amount of information on project - extent of eligible costs.

Les Roper - to L.R. project team, consultants, timescales & programme.

Planning - Michael & Rachel. Pit-applicable request.  
 'Development enquiry' - £100. with stage 2 plans.  
 Be in the system.

Figure 3 (a): AU@MTH - a day in the life





Denzil

Slazing  
Heart  
chairs

{ Carl Kerridge x1  
01736 786090 Tel 197A  
kerrid6@aol.com (yes)

**Figure 3 (b); AU's to-do list**

~~Strip~~

Monday

- A/E meeting - can you put in 2 bids?
- If successful in consortium can still go for next round!

- 01209 615070 / 07837311681 Mel Carpenter / Jade
- Check out The Space
- Meet Bill Emma
- Email Morgan Kevin
- Jan / Feb march

○ Tues / Weds

- Get back re Jack work exp.
- ✓ Follow up Phil Windsor / Nema
- Budget update
- ✓ Big Give
- Sort chairs plan of action for Tot = email / call Tim + Angela
- ✓ Sort Dairy Crest 01209 715703 Mikandmore. → Lisa
- Venue contracts
- = Cancel Macdonald for tonight = Jude (1)
- ✓ Steve starts white wall 1.11.11
- ✓ Decide British travel
- ✓ Email Tim light re partnership 470
- ✓ Pay Jason
- Tot of summer income
- Tot of Tim income
- Chase Lestey re database
- ✓ Set tin community meeting date for next week
- ✓ Tim - check agreement w Russell
- go over Jan plan / 23 Tues → Thurs
- Total # of sessions - tally CAI.

# Appendix 1

## Email invitation to the cases

Hi AU

A strange request, and out of the blue, but how do you fancy taking part in a case study of...your own work as a cultural manager??

My name is Sue Kay and I've worked in the arts and cultural sector in London and the South West for around 30 years (Puppet Centre Trust, London (Administrator); Strode Theatre, Street (Manager); Cockpit Theatre and Arts Centre, London (Head of Theatre Events/Producer); Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre, Taunton (Director); Arts Council England South West (Strategic Planning Officer); Dartington College of Arts (Subject Director, Cultural Management); Culture South West (Executive Director); now freelance). I've also co-written a book with and about producers (*Passion and Performance: managers and producers in theatre and dance*, 2007), and edited/authored some pieces for the Cultural Leadership Programme ([http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/uploads/tx\\_rtgfiles/A\\_cultural\\_leadership\\_reader.pdf](http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/uploads/tx_rtgfiles/A_cultural_leadership_reader.pdf) and <http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/345/>). I know Jane and Ross - so if you want to check out that I'm not a mad axe-murderer, I hope they wouldn't mind!

I'm doing some research at Exeter University, which involves looking at the day to day doings of cultural managers - within the context of the creative work they mediate, support and promote, and specifically within small scale theatre organisations. As you will be aware, there is a real paucity of empirical work in this area. I don't know about you, but I get a bit hacked off with some of the stuff that's written for and about the likes of you and me by those who have never looked at or been up close to the practice. That's the imbalance I want to redress - hopefully with a bit of input from your good self!

It's not a policing exercise and it wouldn't be onerous...I would simply ask you to let me observe you at work (for a duration and in a form to suit you - and the company - in giving me the best account of what you do), and then talk with me about it. I would be willing to act as a non-participant observer, and/or to roll my sleeves up and be a participant one. All my costs would be covered and all results would be shared between us.

My reasons for approaching you are two-fold: I like MTH's work and you come highly recommended!

Is my idea something that might interest you - or would it be a request too far on top of everything else you have to do?!!

Either way - it would be lovely to hear back from you, and I'd be very happy to nip over the Tamar for a chat if you think that would be worthwhile.

All the best

Sue

## Appendix 2

### Data gathered from each case

#### AU @THB

I **observed** KK for a total of 37.5 hours over a period of seven days between 2 August and 6 December 2011. KK suggested that we use her current 'to do' list as the basis for selecting dates to visit and activities to observe. By these means, I had the opportunity to observe KK in a range of settings and situations and was not excluded from anything. I made detailed (descriptive and reflective) field notes of everything I observed. When permitted (and when it seemed appropriate) I also recorded meetings and conversations between KK and others both inside and outside THB, amounting to 6.75 hours of recorded material.

Activities observed included a variety of meetings which KK chaired, facilitated or attended (board, staff, planning, preparatory, funding, network, review), three artist 'surgeries', a visit to a newly opened venue, office time spent at the computer, answering emails, taking/making calls, informally talking to/sharing news with colleagues, and break times (buying and eating lunch).

I **interviewed** KK (on a semi-structured basis) on two occasions (21 November and 6 December 2011) for a period totalling 3.0 hours. These interviews were recorded.

I requested/was given the following **documentation**:

- KK CV/biog
- KK job description for current post
- Sample 'to do' list from KK's A4 notebook
- Emails sent by KK during period of one hour (22 November 2011)
- What Makes a Good Producer? Notes of conference presentation delivered by KK (18 November 2011)
- THB leaflet 2009 - 2011
- Extracts from THB ACE National Portfolio funding bid 2012-2015
- *Bristol Live: A Performance Culture of Ambition* (Discussion Paper, May 2008)

- THB Strategic Plan 2009-2012
- THB Grants for the Arts application: From here to NPO (for period January – March 2012)
- Twenty Five Rules of Fundraising - handout from DCMS seminar by Michael Kaiser
- Minutes and papers from THB Board meeting, 7 September 2011

## **SS@BTH**

I **observed** SS for a total of 40 hours over a period of six days between 11 October and 13 December 2011. SS suggested dates when she knew she had pre-arranged internal and external meetings in her diary. This, she felt, would give me an accurate reflection of her day to day activities at BTH. By these means, I had the opportunity to observe SS in a range of settings and situations and was not excluded from anything. I made detailed (descriptive and reflective) field notes of everything I observed. When permitted (and when it seemed appropriate) I also recorded meetings and conversations between SS and others both inside and outside BTH, amounting to 7.5 hours of recorded material.

Activities observed included a variety of meetings which SS chaired, facilitated or serviced (staff, board sub-committee, budgeting, scoping, catch-up, planning, preparatory, trouble-shooting, coaching, fundraising, funding, internship, community project, network, review), a walking tour of the Hoe in Plymouth to assess potential open-air performing sites, office time spent at the computer, answering emails, taking/making calls, informally talking to/sharing news with colleagues, and break times (eating lunch).

I **interviewed** SS (on a semi-structured basis) on two occasions (11 October and 13 November 2011) for a period totalling 1.75 hours. These interviews were recorded.

I requested/was given the following **documentation**:

- SS CV/biog
- SS job description for current post
- Sample 'to do' list (9 January 2012) from SS's A4 notebook

- Emails sent by SS during period of one hour (30 March 2012)
- BTH ACE National Portfolio funding bid 2012-2015
- BTH Marketing Plan 2011-2012
- *30 Years 30 Voices – BTH Plymouth: the People, the Place, the Art*
- What's on leaflets (Autumn 2011)
- Edinburgh Festival tour - company evaluation questions (2011)
- Revised budget 2011/2012 and forecast budget 2012/2013 (confidential)
- Minutes of Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting (27 October 2011)
- Flourish plan (discussed 28 October 2011)
- Draft application to Foyle Foundation ref. Flourish
- Minutes of meeting, Plymouth Mela CIC (28 October 2011)
- BTH Stage One Bid to ACE Capital Investment Fund
- Feasibility Report on the Proposed Refurbishment of the BTH Building (We Did This, 2010)

## **AU@MTH**

I **observed** AU for a total of 32 hours over a period of seven days between 18 August and 8 December 2011. AU suggested that we base my visits around her contact with the different people she relates to in the course of her work. This, she felt, would give me an accurate reflection of her day to day activities at MTH. By these means, I had the opportunity to observe AU in a range of settings and situations and was not excluded from anything. I made detailed (descriptive and reflective) field notes of everything I observed. When permitted (and when it seemed appropriate) I also recorded meetings and conversations between AU and others both inside and outside MTH, amounting to 7.0 hours of recorded material.

Activities observed included a variety of meetings which AU facilitated or attended (staff, board, planning, preparatory, project, tour, production, marketing, funding), a public event - Taste of Tin – at a theatre in Truro, office time spent at the computer, answering emails, taking/making calls, informally talking to/sharing news with colleagues and others, and break times (eating lunch).

I **interviewed** AU (on a semi-structured basis) on two occasions (16 November and 8 December 2011) for a period totalling 2.7 hours. These interviews were recorded.

I requested/was given the following **documentation**:

- AU CV/biog
- AU job description for current post
- Sample 'to do' list (8 December 2011) from AU's A4 notebook
- Emails sent by AU during period of one hour plus (7 October and 6 November 2011) NB it was AU's suggestion to give me this data, and as a consequence I asked my other cases to do likewise
- Extracts from MTH ACE National Portfolio funding bid 2012-2015
- MTH Business Plan 2011-2014
- Minutes and papers from MTH Board meeting Wednesday 19 October 2011
- Marketing material for Tin



## Appendix 3

### Interview questions asked of each case

- How has this shadowing process been for you? What have you found yourself wondering about?
- What do you think you spend most of your day doing when you're at work – if we were to pick a typical day?
- How many hours a week do you reckon you work?
- What's good and enjoyable about what you do? What are the bits that really excite you?
- What's the most difficult or challenging part of what you do? What do you hate or dread?
- When you're having a difficult or stressful time at work, what keeps you going?
- Where do you get your support from?
- What three words best describe what this organisation is all about?
- How do you feel about the organisation?
- What place does the organisation's artistic work play in what you do?
- Tell me a story about a moment in your work here you're most proud of...
- Tell me a story about a moment in your work here you'd rather forget...
- What label would you use to describe your job...arts manager...producer...?
- If you had to sum up your job in a ten second nugget, what would you say?
- What advice would you give to someone thinking of taking up a career as an arts or cultural manager?
- If you weren't doing this job, what would you be doing?
- Thinking back over the observation period, is there anything you do that I haven't had the chance to see?
- Is there anything you'd like to tell me that you haven't had the chance to say?
- Is there anything more you'd like to know from me?

# Appendix 4

5/12/11	
10.00	
Everyone else has moved out of the office - Michael 'barricaded' into corner. Mince pies & satsumas. Emma - conno prob's + WHS & 'ownership'. 'This is sweet week' AV. Annie - prob. accessing mgt accts. Lisa in. (birthday). Emma out → Tesco: run out of coffee. Lisa come back later. Looks like the big give - match seems to be running out very early. Dismissed Taster of Tin last night. Seven choices (comm) now having to put commitment on hold - too many people. Ask to incorp. choices into show - poss. v. time-consuming. 'but we don't know yet how long it's going to take to get everyone working well with the company.' calls in - pos. feedback last night.	Refurb./move has started & will really kick off next week. This is <u>not</u> a good day to be in! Why is Michael's Big Give paused already? It's only 10.30? Loss of much of and see. BB product-led. Diffie to plan except on emergent basis.

## Appendix 5

Miracle int AU 16.11.11

.ine	Transcript	Code	Notes
1	AU (inaudible) as a team of 3, we are in the middle. We are		
2	halfway through turning the corner but I know that we are		
3	going to get around it and it's just been really positive.		Being in the middle of the org.
4	SK I think it's interesting what you said about how interesting		
5	that I am in here this week because it felt different. It felt		
6	different today, and I didn't know what that might have been		
7	due to but it did feel kind of relaxed.		
8	AU Yeah, we're all really, really busy but it still comes down		
9	to...we are doing this project to... supposed to be fun and we		
10	also are wanting to do it. There's not point spending the next		
11	6 months being stressed. We are all working as hard as we		
12	can and I guess, yes, the (inaudible) still comes up a lot		
13	(laughter) and actually you have got to prioritise the		Priorities shift Now - project & production
14	production and the project. That, at the end of the day, that's		
15	the bit that is going to make or break the project and		
16	everything else is either a bonus or it might be lovely but it		
17	isn't a priority. And none of us...not that anybody ever takes		
18	it all too seriously but we do get stressed and it is kind of like		Not taking it all too seriously
19	we were all in it together. And you know it is down to getting		
20	that funding. You kind of want to say we've got it but I realise		
21	that particular application has probably been hanging over		
22	me for about a year, all the time that I should have been		
23	writing it and haven't got it done yet, to the getting it in on the		
24	very last possible date that I could get it in on, and that was		
25	in June so then it's still going to be 4 months of waiting so it's		
26	been at least 8 months, if not a year, hanging over me.		Stress & anxiety
27	SK What is it about this job that gives you a buzz then? What		
28	aspects of it are kind of most exciting for you?		
29	AU I guess, well, I still probably do it because of the people that I		
30	work with so if I wasn't...so that is to me probably the main		
31	thing. And audiences feeling like we're...I don't know, there's		
32	just something that feels different about Miracle, that it is kind		
33	of genuine and authentic...and OK, some parts of it might be		
34	rough round the edges but its heart's in the right place and		
35	seeing loads of people have a really good night. And they		
36	are there now thinking, this is why I haven't rung up so-and-		
37	so on that particular day and booked this venue then all of		
38	these people wouldn't be here now. It's quite weird when you		People = motivator & beneficiary
39			The Buzz!



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