How do we progress and develop work on diversity and inclusion that was started prior to the pandemic?
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Paving the way

The conversation began with a provocation – in order to illustrate how genuine the commitments of venues, companies and individuals are, as a sector we should normalise people giving up positions of power to those people the industry states it wants to be leading on positive changes. In response, an issues was raised with the term *giving up* – we should instead be focussing on sharing and collaborating, not perpetuating feelings of *us vs them*. To this end, the aim should be to invite people to the table who never had a chance to be there in the first place. The existing structures are so established – we can't just tear them down, even if we would like to, this is not how society works. However, gatekeepers must be actively looking for who they are missing out and where they can improve.

Either way, power-sharing and stepping aside, has to go hand-in-hand with mentoring practices and passing the ladder down. We often don't realise when we have accumulated power or privilege, which is something everyone should be thinking about. Everyone in leadership positions must have to think at some point about who will replace them and if their *exit strategy* does not actively take this into account then we will end up with more of the same. In some cases, this could or should be implemented at board-level.

At the same time, perhaps our concept of leadership needs to be reconsidered – the industry does not have to be organised in pyramid power structures. The horizontal power structures that exist in artistic work often isn't replicated in the organisations that facilitate it. This could be replicated by incorporating more freelancers and artists into existing power structures. For some artistic leaders, the organisation is intrinsically linked to their principles and practices as a creative, which makes it hard to move on.

Many artistic leadership roles come with a set tenure, which requires consideration of the turnover of the role – this process is usually overseen by boards who therefore shape the

perceptions of what is required from a successful artistic leader. ADs, for example, are increasingly now appointed as *chief execs* of the charitable company alongside, or even instead of, being *artistic director* of a theatre company. It needs to be recognised that these are two separate skills.

As part of paving the way for new people, it is essential that individuals are not set up to fail and are supported in new roles. This is not to say that people can't learn from mistakes but if you are giving someone a seat at the table then it cannot be the first time that they *see* the table, including their responsibilities. This requires stepping stones and mentorship. For example, some organisations invite their associate artists into board meetings. Showing people *behind the curtain* in this way does not mean showing them how it should be done, but enabling them to propose change from a position of knowledge.

This doesn't just apply to leadership positions but also creative roles, through programmes such as paid mentorships, which give early careers artists knowledge, support and empowerment. These schemes should have the potential to lead to employment and progress through scales of work. Theatre companies should look at all areas of their organisation to identify progression paths. In order to be aware of where change might be required, several organisations also follow up with creatives after shows, which could be expanded to all freelance workers, to allow for anonymous feedback on their experience.

These principles also need to be applied to the appointment of boards, because chairs and trustees are often in positions of power which shape these decisions and can be appointed without scrutiny. This process should be received at Arts Council level to ensure, amongst other things, that   recruitment panels are more diverse (across a number of parameters.) Positions on boards are often perceived as a status symbol without actually considering the responsibilities and legal requirements. At the same time, the roles need demystifying for new individuals to come through. As an example of better practice, the framework of training, accountability and feedback for school governors was cited, which as well as preparing individuals for the role allows for parents and other parties to engage. It was suggested that FMTW could run seminars with chairs, execs etc to talk to freelancers about being on a board to demystify the process and enable people to see themselves in such roles.

It was pointed out that, in terms of stepping aside, the people in these conversations are rarely the people who need to give up power and that there is, therefore, a frustration about accountability. Likewise, it appears that it is often the '*poorer'* theatres that make the most progress, while the more well-resourced theatres are slower to change. Similarly, the concept of "diversity" is still generally only considered along the terms of the white, male patriarchal structure and will therefore always face an uphill struggle without radical change.

"Emerging leaders"

The lack of diversity among artistic leaders can mean that individuals who aren't represented at this level do not consider themselves for these roles. By inviting individuals on to selection panels for roles, they can see what the parameters by which they might

consider their own status. This does not mean that we should be trying to think about future ADs, which would limit ourselves, but we need to find ways to demystify the process so that people (and not just directors) feel able to put themselves forward.

At the same time, it was suggested that we also need to fix the system first so that we're not bringing people into a broken structure. As a provocation, maybe there are things we can tear down and imagine better. However, even without these changes, freelancers should feel like they *can* actively put themselves forward for these positions in order to make the changes they want to see. We shouldn't have to change the perception of these roles for people to be feel like they are right for them.

The structure we exist in is the "factory setting" (e.g. white, male, able-bodied concepts) which we all in some way buy into. As well as looking at how we challenge and reset this we need to look at the ways we are *not* supporting alternative versions of leadership. People who don't lead in the established way are not celebrated by the industry – we need to find them and hold them up.

The industry needs radical change but in some cases this requires a *gentle* reframing of the 'factory settings'. Many artists, in particular those with disabilities, are held back by the way that work is made, right down to the dynamic in the rehearsal room. Making small practical shift to this set up (in one individual's case, shifting to working from a beanbag instead of behind a desk) can allow for more effective work and therefore more regular work. This in turn makes the room more accessible to other people. Similarly, rehearsals taking place from 10-6 is standard practice but not accessible to everyone and does not have to be the way we do things. Establishing working practices prior to the start of a project for everyone to sign up to helps facilitate these changes. Along similar lines of transparency, one theatre has introduced "The Chair" to their rehearsal room – for people to sit in and observe rehearsals. These shifts take time but we are currently in an unsettling, urgent, frozen moment, which could facilitate dismantling the 'factory settings' and acknowledging our own complicity.

The current crisis

We also need to look at the present, not just the future, and bridge the gap between what exists and what we want. We need to accelerate work on change in this moment, not pause it. This is everybody's responsibility – freelancers and organisations – and we risk supressing empathy by not allowing people to advocate outside of their lived experience. Any moment of change is only successful if everyone is empowered so we don't overwhelm ourselves or rely on individuals to solve the problems. Stage Sight breaks facilitating change into essential commitments: be open to enquires, share your learning and practise fair pay. It also focusses on practical changes through three areas: inclusive and open recruitment practices, reaching out to improve the visibility of off-stage roles and developing new pathways through learning and training experiences.

The level of the crisis we are currently facing requires a similar level of response – voices being heard doesn't mean anything unless those voices have a democratic position and

active participation. It was suggested that the scale of the crisis has been missing from this conversation – a lot of people are going to be lost from our sector, which will only make these issues worse. The current apolitical response to this crisis from organisations is avoiding the problem and both failing to protect the most vulnerable people in the industry and stoking the feeling that some individuals don't deserve to be here. We should be pushing for more companies to embrace democratic structures to combat this.

The industry isn't currently viable for lots of freelancers unless the situation changes in the immediate future, i.e. by March next year. Discussions about boards and leadership are irrelevant to freelancers who are going to leave the industry or lose their jobs. Institutions are failing to ask the right questions to these people and find ways to support them.

Final Thoughts

In concluding the discussion, individuals expressed: the conversation's focus on power and not resources; a call to leave people who can't collaborate behind; a desire for more transparency in board structures; the beanbag as a metaphor for embracing new ways of working; change requiring everyone, and an embracing of anger, empathy and strategic thinking alongside each other; the need to look at all levels of the industry, not just the top, and a provocation for ADs to put their words into practice; the difference between change and resilience and questions of how we reshape our response to the crisis to stop people from falling through the gap; an honesty about hitting a wall, both in face of the scale of the crisis and the political response; a motivation to revisit organisational responses to freelancers; an openness to challenge and being held to account; gratitude for everyone's strength to contribute to these conversations; being inspired to demand not ask, and a belief that ultimately we will survive this as communities not as buildings.

Chairs' Notes

The enormity of the Future Lab centring on questions of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was not underestimated. In a room full of people who have had to fight for their voices to be heard, who have likely been silenced throughout their career and who may have faced societal as well as sectoral discrimination, we knew that two hours could not scratch the surface of the work that needs to be done or the perspectives that need to be heard. It is perhaps unsurprising that the conversation turned to leadership, with a focus on actively dismantling power structures from the top down as this work has been working slowly but successfully prior to the pandemic demonstrated by the leaders in the room.

The conversation was fruitful but left so much undiscussed - do we need to ensure equality and diversity is on every agenda instead of siloing the conversation? Lasting questions from this Lab centred around how we view immediacy, how we provide immediate solutions without becoming tokenistic and who we hold accountable for making this work happen? Those in the room have all demonstrated how committed they are, the greater question is how committed are those who currently choose to avoid the depth of conversations like this. EDI is a conversation that underpins every aspect of our industry and there are many

perspectives which need to be heard under the EDI umbrella. Moving forward we hope that honing in on a specific question will be a useful approach to gathering more solutions and enabling deeper conversation that makes space for the many crossovers and shared experiences that need to be heard.