

A new wave of leaders

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A new Office for Leadership Transition is advocating for more diversified models of cultural leadership. **Sandeep Mahal** shares the aims of the programme.



In her book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, Reni Eddo Lodge states: "I want to deconstruct the structural power of a system that marked me out as different." Our sector is embarking on seismic change and tackling head-on issues of diversity, equality and inclusion is crucial to transformation.

We have seen decisive statements and some quick fix initiatives, but to really transform cultural leadership and the future of the cultural sector, we need to combat under-representation at senior levels, proactively make way for new perspectives, and implement a re-distribution of cultural leadership.

A giant daunting leap into leading

In 2014, I embarked on my own leadership journey, appointed to my first senior cultural leadership role at [The Space](#) through a secondment opportunity created by the Clore Fellowship programme. I took a giant, daunting leap into leading and was supported to learn and adapt, to experiment and fail, and to grow and move on.

Since the [2020 Culture Reset](#) programme - part of a sector-wide commitment to inclusive, progressive change - I've been reflecting on the structural inequalities that exist in the sector and the initiatives borne of Covid such as *Freelancers Make Theatre Work* and *We Shall Not Be Removed*.

They demonstrate that change leadership is most effective when distributed and generous and undertaken without concern for ownership. Advocating for a more diversified model of leadership feels like an important shift if the sector wants to take a truly inclusive approach to diversification at senior levels.

From good intentions to concrete change

The starting point for leadership transition is an acknowledgement from those who are responsible for the structural hierarchies and hold the power that now is the right time to make this change. They might be checking in with their own privilege to acknowledge 'we must do something to better reflect the audiences and communities that we exist to serve'.

But how do we encourage cultural leaders to shift from declaring good intentions and socially progressive concepts to concrete plans? To developments that are grounded in reality, linked to specific actions in the diary, supported with resources, and overseen by trustees to ensure momentum, accountability and impact?

[The Office for Leadership Transition](#) is a new initiative that responds to that need for that transformation. It has been created for three reasons: to address systemic issues of inequality and intolerable barriers to progression; to support a dynamic transformation of representation at senior levels; and to build a new blended learning network for sustainable diverse leadership.

It requires different models, interventions, and a change in conditions to create the opportunities and spaces so that new energy, innovation and talent can get in and get on.

Making it work

I'm co-developing the Office with Richard Watts of *people make it work*. They've been supporting cultural organisations to change and develop for more than 20 years. Working together, we seek to:

- provide a series of meaningful interventions aimed, with care, at individual senior leaders with a wraparound programme of support;
- assist cultural organisations to lead systemic and behavioural change to transition their leadership (both people and practices); and
- offer new perspectives, new people, new forms and new inclusive models of practice.

We will work with and for organisations to provide a range of services to enable transition readiness with care and integrity. These include tailored consultancy, leadership model development, managed restructures, and recruitment support as well as expert advice and toolkits for transition planning, HR and IP and pipeline talent development. We are also developing cohort-based programmes for groups of leaders and organisations that want to learn together.

A dynamic and supported transformation

The transition will not be the sole preserve of directors and chief executives. It won't be confined to a few lines in the strategic plan. It will, instead, be fuelled by collaboration and an expansion of opportunities to nurture the kinds of creative, civic and brave senior leadership that we are modelling through the Office.

We are sensitive in our approach and will work with leadership teams to create the conditions for systemic conversations - questioning, reflecting, learning - about organisational risk-aversion to power dynamics and advancing equity in leadership.

The conversations alone will not fix the system. But from acknowledging and exploring, we can begin to consider actions. And to feel capable of making those transitions, leaving the old situations, systems and practices behind to welcome new structures, processes, perspectives and talent breakthroughs.

The next wave of leadership

We recognise there are many different reasons why organisations find it difficult to transition leadership. For example, leaders might be considering stepping aside to make way for new leadership perspectives but are in need of a clear roadmap to support such a proactive transition. Or a place-based or artform consortium might be considering the 'next wave of leaders' and seeking leadership development support for under-represented voices.

Or a board might decide that the current leadership doesn't bring the necessary skills, perspectives or practices for the organisation to be relevant, representative and resilient for the future. They might recognise change needs to happen but need support and guidance to implement their intentions.

Whatever the scenario, the Office for Leadership Transition is designed to reflect that and help organisations push forward their diversity agendas by focusing on impact, and by initiating and embedding proactive structural and culture change at senior levels within organisations.

The need for disruptive innovation, systemic change and a transformation is very real and present. Our challenge today is how to move on from wishful thinking and good intentions to really combat under-representation at senior levels. If this is a challenge your organisation is facing, maybe the Office for Leadership Transition can help.

Sandeep Mahal is an Associate Consultant at [people make it work](#), leading on [The Office for Leadership Transition](#).

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This article, sponsored and contributed by people make it work, is [part of a series](#) sharing insights and learning to support the cultural sector change and develop to meet the challenges it faces.

[people make is work](#) is a group of 60 freelance cultural leaders who work together with a shared mission. Together, they support the cultural sector to change and develop. They do that with transformational programmes for organisations, leaders and creative individuals, direct strategic consultancy for organisations and cities and by offering free tools, guidance, advice and resources that everyone can access. They do all this to realise a fairer, more representative, resilient and relevant cultural sector.

Link to Author(s): [Sandeep Mahal](#)

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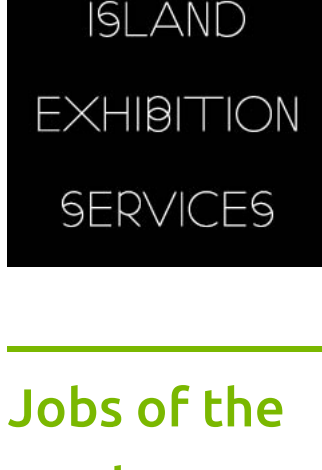
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North West

The Spring

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South West
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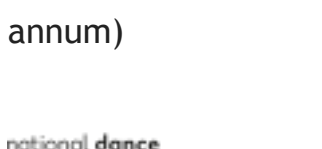
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North West
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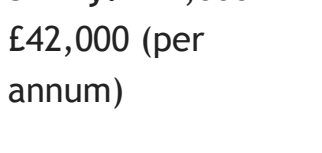
Head of Transformation

South West
Salary: £47,773 - £49,879 (per annum)



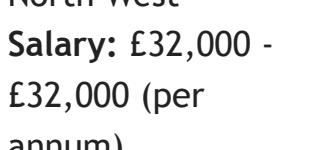
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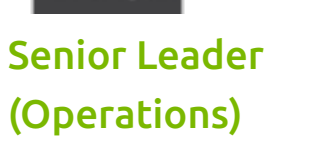
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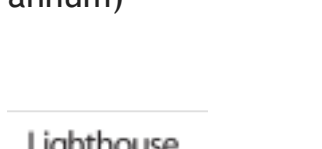
Programme Director

East
Salary: £35,000 - £40,000 (per annum)



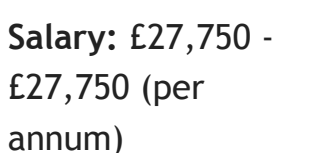
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Salary: £27,750 - £27,750 (per annum)



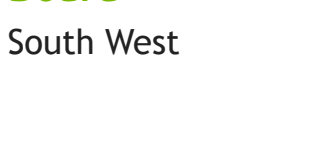
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South West



General Manager

North West
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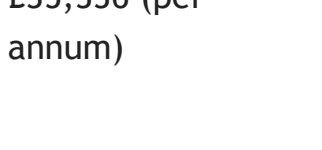
Programme Manager

North West
Salary: £32,798 - £35,336 (per annum)



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