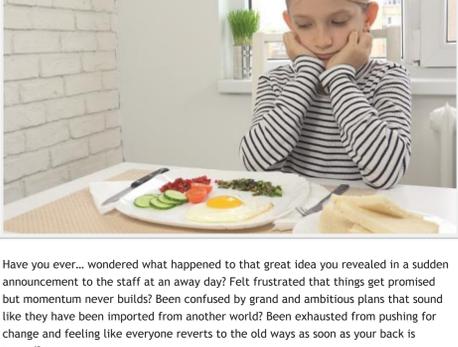


Building an appetite for change

An ArtsProfessional feature in partnership with **people make it work** we help organisations change and develop

It's hard asking people to explore uncertainty – but when consensus is built across the organisation, it can unleash huge energy, says **Richard Watts**.



Have you ever... wondered what happened to that great idea you revealed in a sudden announcement to the staff at an away day? Felt frustrated that things get promised but momentum never builds? Been confused by grand and ambitious plans that sound like they have been imported from another world? Been exhausted from pushing for change and feeling like everyone reverts to the old ways as soon as your back is turned?

When we're talking about here is appetite for change, or what we at [people make it work](#) call 'change hunger'. It's hard to ask people to go through new and difficult steps, to explore uncertainty and undo lots of things that feel hard won, unless we've started by surfacing what is wrong today, and why new ways of working are needed.

When we have an appetite for change - when we're change hungry - we'll go to extraordinary lengths, take really significant risks and endure pain and discomfort. If the ends are worth it, it seems there's no limit to what we'll do... but we need to be choosing to be involved, to be taking the steps, to be exploring, testing, building our new understanding. We need to be in control of this process for it to be something that we can be in flow with.

Healthy scepticism

Change is done by people, not to people. Most of the time people don't resist change - they resist being changed. We know that when people are reticent about creating change, they're often being given pause by fear, confusion or the need for support and training. 'Change resistors' are often displaying healthy scepticism. With access to a good organisational memory, they have an understanding of 'how things really work round here'.

We know that change in our organisations is going to grind to a halt, fizzle out or meander into waste ground if we haven't built self-confidence, capacity and ownership. Just like social change, organisational change needs appetite, agency and resources to make it happen.

Leaders on the Change Creation programme have been working to bring crystal clarity to the need for change in their organisations - to articulate the opportunities that open up for them if they do change, and the threats or challenges that close in on them if they don't. Using tools like our [Threats and Opportunities Matrix](#), the Change Creation cohort has been able to create a real desire for change across their organisations.

Judith Harry, Executive Director of Sheffield's Site Gallery, says: "With the support of Change Creation we completely changed our governance model. We had many long-standing trustees who have given their time and expertise generously for many years. We knew we wanted to maintain that support, while attracting new trustees that represented our audiences and communities. I had a sense of what would work well for Site's future, and really wanted to create changes while crucially, maintaining relationships and support. But I know I have a tendency to take on too much responsibility, to feel like I've got to do everything myself. Working with Change Creation, it was clear that this process didn't belong to me exclusively. It needed to belong to, and be driven by, the board. I needed to create an appetite for change."

"The review process was so positive. The board identified the changes and improvements needed. They drove the process, and together we've delivered our reimagined governance. We now have clearly defined roles and an agreement on a fixed term approach for future trustees. Time and effort has been invested to formalise an induction process, and several of our long-standing trustees have formed a Nominations Committee to spend their last year on the board helping us shape, develop and challenge in our new and future trustees. We've recruited for new board members. The profile of the applicants was really positive and completely different to previous recruitment efforts. By the end of the year we will have seven new, fully inducted board members, including new young trustees and a clear plan for recruitment over the coming years."

Appetite leads to energy

Once there is consensus across the organisation that change is needed, the next step becomes more like an unleashing than a push. With a shared desire to explore and develop new ways of working, our role as change leader becomes to offer guidance (bearing in mind our mission, our desired impact and some of the constraints we might be working within) rather than the task master issuing edicts and demanding progress. A collective exercise using a tool like the 'As is... To be' model enables us to mobilise energy and input from across the organisation when planning our future direction.

Many cultural organisations today are confronted with challenges to their income, becoming preoccupied by the demands of insatiable business models. But I'd say that the biggest challenge we see is related to relevance rather than revenue. It takes us back to questions about mission and impact rather than money and cashflow.

So many of the leaders we are working with at [people.make.it.work](#) are struggling to understand the systemic changes they'll need to make in order to be more relevant to their audiences, communities, artists and places - and to these times. I think the biggest challenge we currently have is how do we - with full respect for the taxpayers and audiences who fund our work - ensure that we are inclusive, relevant and essential?

Essential: it's a high bar to set. But yes, essential. Because our society needs us to be. Because it's probably implied in our charitable missions. And because the work we make must need to be seen.

Our change challenge today is: how do we make that case for change? If this is a challenge you're facing, then [maybe some of these tools will help](#).

Richard Watts is Director of [people make it work](#).

www.changecreation.org

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This article, sponsored and contributed by [people make it work](#), is part of a series sharing insights and learning to help organisations facing change challenges to grow and develop.

Change Creation is a two-year programme designed and delivered by people make it work. It works with 'change hungry' arts and cultural leaders who are looking to lead and realise tangible changes that will have a lasting impact on people, organisations, audiences and participants. Applications are now open for up to 30 organisations with compelling change plans (deadline: 16 September). If you're change hungry and would benefit from support, tools, resources, change leadership training, masterclasses, workshops and action learning, please get in touch. Contact hello@changecreation.org

Link to Author(s): [Richard Watts](#)

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Published: 05-09-2019

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East Midlands
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South West
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