



Five steps towards a new future

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

A structured reflection process can support arts leaders to find tentative answers to the overwhelming problems they are facing. **Richard Watts** offers a framework to guide the process.



Photo: Jeremy Beck on Unsplash

We are all wise novices as we navigate these uncharted waters. Wise because we have depths of wisdom and humanity that we can draw on in these novel times; wise because we have experience that guides us through; and wise because we know we don't know and so we seek out counsel from others and take time to find some kind of consensus. We're wise because we have missions and values to guide us when that experience feels too meagre to sustain us. Novices because these are unprecedented circumstances and we feel alone in history.

The cultural sector isn't simply a business with a cashflow and a business model (although it needs those things to stay afloat and chart a course). It is an endeavour with humanity as its raw material, its manufacturing process, its labour, its product and its consumer. Cultural organisations don't exist to serve themselves, keep their buildings open, sell tickets, keep employees paid or to coldly distribute art. They exist for their beneficiaries, their audiences, their communities, our society.

Serving society

Asking, "What does our society need from us today?" rather than, "How can we carry on doing what we've been doing as everything changes around us?" feels like the most important question for our cultural colleagues, leadership teams and boards alike at this extraordinary time. And let's remember, it's an extraordinary time for this planet, our humanity, these nations, these communities, this town, this family, these futures. Our cultural organisations exist to serve and enable humanity, communities, towns and futures - I guess we must all commit to remembering it's not the other way around.

As we all ask that fundamental question "What does our society need from us today?", it's useful to view the experience of the last 6 weeks or so through a lens of 5 stages. Depending on your organisation and its context, you might be at any one of these stages, although I think most are just entering the third stage.

- R¹ React** - Initial and immediate response to social lockdown measures, including making people, buildings and assets as safe as possible.
- R² Respond** - Conscious deployment of creative and organisational resources and plans, including furloughing staff, releasing digital resources and moving into a 'low-power' mode.
- R³ Reflect** - Making and taking time to review stages 1 and 2, explore our new environment, build deep learning, develop potential future scenarios and grow deep insight. Explore the need for transformation.
- R⁴ Reimagine** - Building ideas and responses that might be needed, exploring how we might transform ourselves to meet future challenges. Reimagining ourselves, inspired by our mission and in response to the world. Shaping answers to the 5 challenges facing us.
- R⁵ Reshape** - Rebuilding our organisation in response to our times (which might be reshuffle changes or fundamental transformation depending on your context and analysis). Aligning our organisations to our new models.

Existential questions

At people make it work we are creating an R5 tool that helps organisations through this reflection process, suggesting some deceptively simple questions to help draw out learning, shape scenarios and support you to arrive at some tentative answers - the best that any of us can do at this time. [You'll find a prototype here.](#)

Finding the right time for this reflective, strategic work is imperative - too soon and it feels abstract and crass to be exploring the wider implications while we are battling for survival, but too late and we might have inadvertently taken irreversible decisions that exacerbate social injustices, reduce opportunities to connect and limit our relevance in the longer term. There is a sweet spot in between, when the organisation and its people are ready, or can be made ready, for one of the most important conversations in its history - what does society need of us today?

Design a future

As well as enabling us all to ask these existential questions, the R⁵ tool we are crafting with the sector is helping organisations design a future. Most of our cultural organisations are facing the same crucial challenges in the R⁴ 'Reimagine' stage. We are all challenging ourselves to imagine how to do five essential things:

Create a new dynamic, flexible business plan fit for our times - one that supports your organisation's future, built on novel models that can respond and flex to new situations, protects cashflow, and give a level of clarity for the next 6 months at least. Novel structural and partnership models that reduce costs and increase stability are to be explored.

Build new working practices for virtual and semi virtual teams and relationships - developing new ways of working remotely, collaboratively and with agency. Embed the best bits of how you recently reacted, adopting some agile and 'sprint' working so you can create cleaner, stronger ways of working for the long-term. Identify best ways to support your people and your furloughed teams right now.

Reimagine relationships with audiences and communities that reflect the new world - discover what they need right now and in the future, extending thinking and opening up to challenge. Develop plans, practices, propositions and programming that sustains existing audiences and communities, and reaches new ones, elevating relevance, connection and empathy.

Explore new income models and sources as secondary spend and ticket sales disappear - develop plans to diversify income and impact so that we can access new money, mining our value propositions, exploring our heritage and intellectual property and generating new value (that eventually creates new income.) Explore loan finance, social impact finance and build new income-earning propositions inspired by audiences and their needs.

Shape the cultural offer to flex with a post-covid or with-covid social landscape - develop new protocols for cultural spaces that reflect new government guidance and/or social habits, that react to current concerns, artists responses and the 'supply challenges' that the lockdown hiatus creates. Find an offer, on and offline, that people find essential and accessible.

Finding answers

Naturally while the questions we are exploring might be the same for many of us, the solutions will be specific to each of us - built out of an understanding of our place, our audiences and our own heritage, practice, relationships, values and mission. Such an authentic response, built on these strong foundations, takes a depth of thought, a breadth of insight and a rigour and empathy that our cultural leaders are so well qualified to mobilise.

In our team we are working on new tools, templates, resources and guidance to enable each organisation in the sector to find their answers to these common challenges. We are building those first of all with our Change Creation cohort of 60 Leaders from 40 organisations in the weeks ahead, and then we'll be sharing them far and wide. If you'd like to help co-design those tools (we do our best work in collaboration) or feel that you could help us fast-track some of them, then do get in touch with us. You'll also find prototypes constantly shared on our [website](#) for your free use.

people make it work is a team of 50 colleagues - most are cultural leaders in their own right - with about 160 cultural sector clients at this time. We have committed that "every cultural organisation and leader should be provided with the expert support they need at this time, regardless of their ability to pay" and we are realising that commitment to clients and non clients alike, and for organisations of all scales, contexts and artforms, by providing

- [free daily drop in surgeries](#) including a triage service, hosted by a [different cultural leader and colleague each day](#),
- free [expert video panels every week](#),
- free video insights from our consultants, [released every day](#), and
- [free tools and resources](#) built for these times and for you to download.

We are also offering individual 1:1 support for every cultural organisation that approaches us, of all scales, artforms and contexts. We'd love you to [get in touch for 1:1 support](#) if the tools don't support you on your journey. And [join our mailing list](#) to get practical tools - always free.

Richard Watts is CEO of people make it work and Co-Director of Change Creation [www.peoplemakeitwork.com](#) [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.

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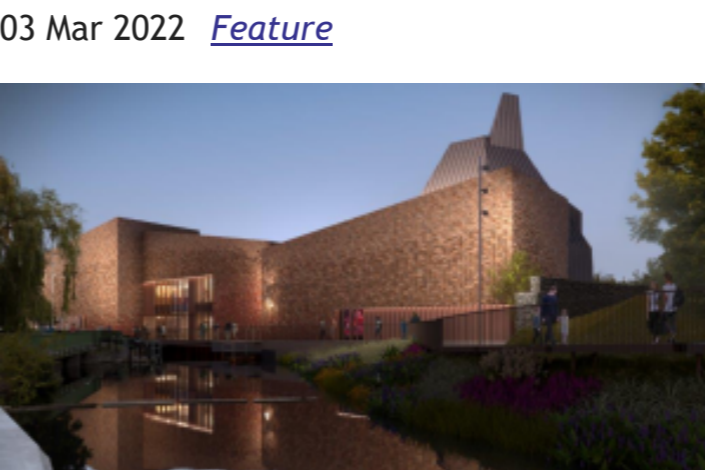
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North West
Salary: £35,000 - £38,000 (pro rata)

OPEN EYE GALLERY

Tree Story - freelance positions

North West

Lighthouse

Creative Engagement Manager

South West
Salary: £28,000 - £28,000 (per annum)

The Spring

Director & Chief Executive

South West
Salary: £40,000 - £44,000 (per annum)

Kent Music

Senior Leader (Operations)

South East
Salary: £42,000 - £42,000 (per annum)

CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE

Head of Human Resources (part time)

South East
Salary: £40,000 - £44,000 (pro rata)

MIP

Executive Producer

North West
Salary: £54,000 - £58,000 (per annum)

ROBIN PRODUCTIONS

Programme Manager

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

Lighthouse

Ticket Sales Manager

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

MIP

Music Events Manager

North West
Salary: £30,000 - £32,000 (per annum)

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South West
Salary: 37,000 - 37,000 (pro rata)

BRISTOL OLD VIC

Artistic Director

South West
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North West
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Artistic Director Joint CEO

South West
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Head of Marketing and Audiences

North West
Salary: £45,000 - £50,000 (per annum)

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Head of Transformation

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

MARKETPLACE

Programme Director

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

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East Midlands
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Creative Director and Arts Centre Manager

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LIVERPOOL ROYAL COURT

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Executive Producer

Wales
Salary: £42,000 - £42,000 (per annum)

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Chair of the Board

South West

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Executive Producer

Wales
Salary: £42,000 - £42,000 (per annum)

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