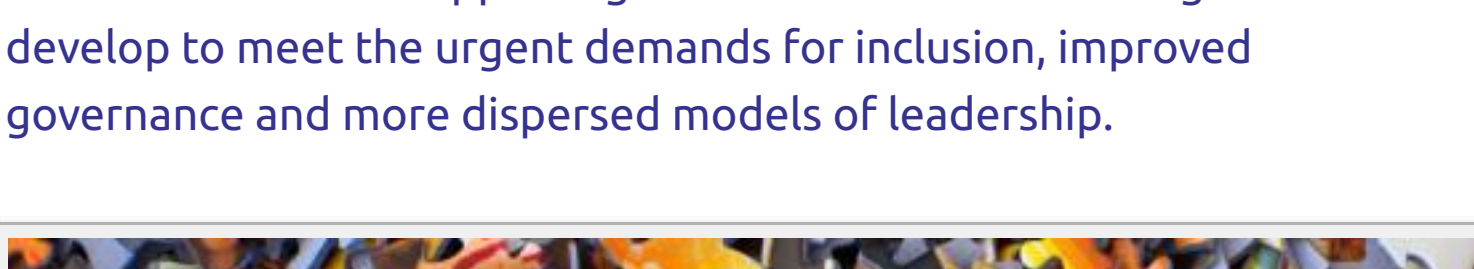


What do we mean by a systemic conversation?



Building on Culture Reset, **Richard Watts** shares a range of new initiatives aimed at supporting the cultural sector to change and develop to meet the urgent demands for inclusion, improved governance and more dispersed models of leadership.

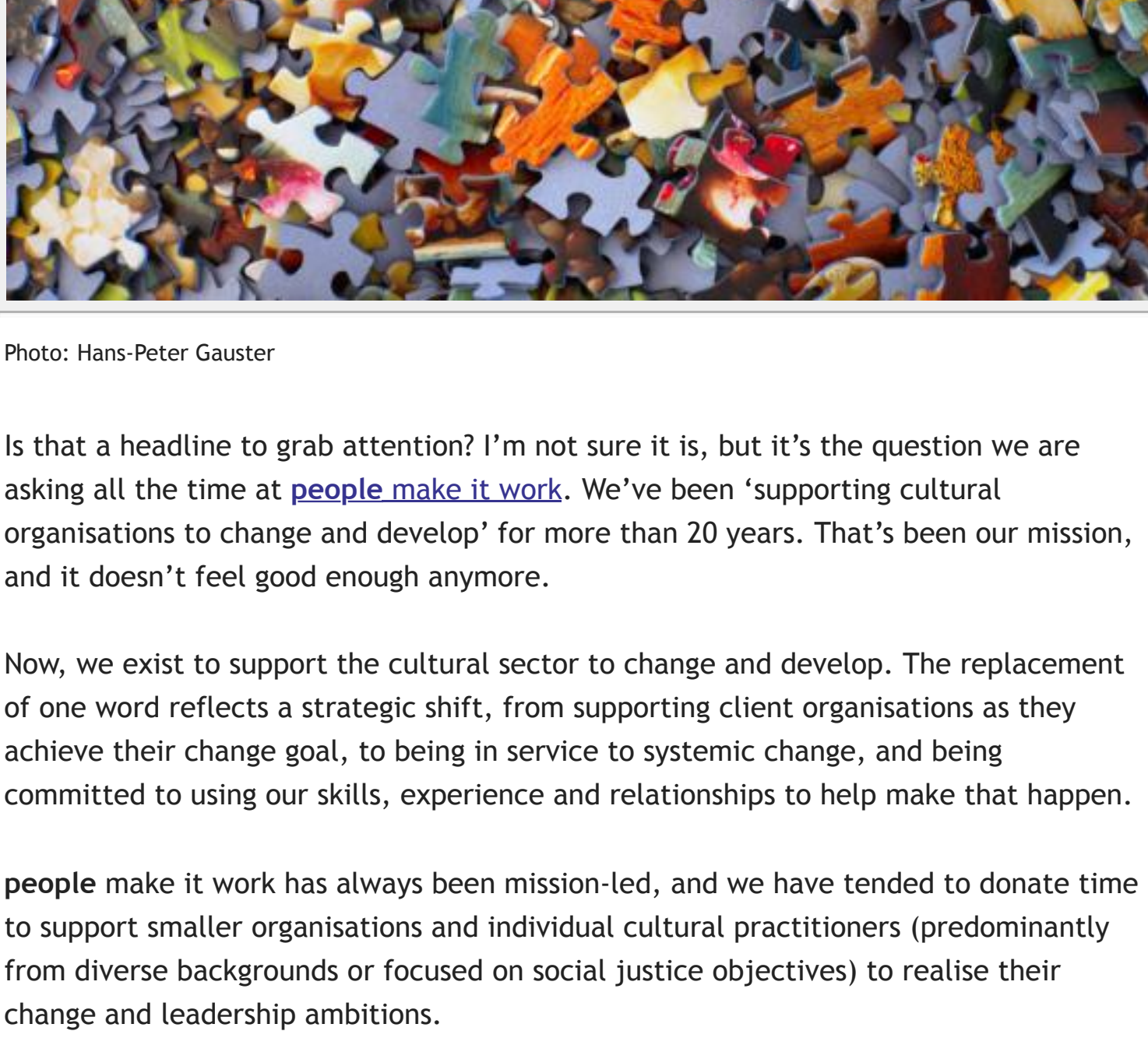


Photo: Hans-Peter Gauster

Is that a headline to grab attention? I'm not sure it is, but it's the question we are asking all the time at [people make it work](#). We've been 'supporting cultural organisations to change and develop' for more than 20 years. That's been our mission, and it doesn't feel good enough anymore.

Now, we exist to support the cultural sector to change and develop. The replacement of one word reflects a strategic shift, from supporting client organisations as they achieve their change goal, to being in service to systemic change, and being committed to using our skills, experience and relationships to help make that happen.

people make it work has always been mission-led, and we have tended to donate time to support smaller organisations and individual cultural practitioners (predominantly from diverse backgrounds or focused on social justice objectives) to realise their change and leadership ambitions.

During the pandemic we made a pledge that 'every cultural organisation and leader should be provided with the expert support they need at this time, regardless of their ability to pay', which meant free videos, tools and advice for anyone who needed it. We also created Culture Reset which we self-funded alongside generous grant funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Why doesn't someone do something?
So what's changed for us? I suppose it's a recognition that it's not good enough to work with what we are offered, to support the organisations who knock on our door (most often with our fee in their pocket) and complement that with some pro bono or discounted work on the fringes of our portfolio.

In the past, organisations might have stated the conditions they are working within as external to themselves; indeed, pointed to them as reasons they might have missed targets or failed to deliver on ambitions. We would have heard, "the problem is there just aren't talented people from x community who can play at the expert level we need" or "what you don't understand is how hard it is to get people from x community to apply". We might have heard, "they (someone, those other people, that other organisation) should invest more (support more, intervene earlier, do something) so that the issue is addressed, or the barriers are removed". You might have heard yourself in those words.

Today we are more likely to hear a systemic conversation with an awareness of the causal relationships, the involvement, the complicity even. We are more likely to see organisations choosing to frame one of their strategic goals around systemic change. From: why doesn't someone do something? To: what could we do that would make a positive difference?

How to frame a systemic conversation
So how do you frame a systemic conversation in your organisation, with your team, with your board, across your city, in your town, within your artform? We've pulled together some [tools and approaches](#) and some systemic interventions for inspiration.

- [Pegasus Opera](#) is a black opera company based in Brixton growing a national set of partnerships and building an agency for opera singers of colour who are too often missing from our stages.
- [Literature Wales](#) has developed the [Representing Wales](#) programme, led by the brilliant Della Hill, to support the development of Welsh writers of colour who are under-represented in the Welsh canon.
- [Spread the word](#) developed and managed [The Complete Works](#) from 2008-10. The Complete Works provoked a cultural shift in the dynamics and diversity of the British Poetry Scene (and supported the development journeys of poets including Malika Booker, Roger Robinson, Inua Ellams, Warsan Shire and Raymond Antrobus).
- [PBS Foundation](#) and partners initiated [Keychange](#) in 2015 to create a more inclusive music industry.
- [Action Aid](#) has created and adopted a [Feminist Leadership model](#) that inspires organisations beyond their sector (including people make it work, who have adopted its principles) to lead with compassion and care.
- [Fuel](#) often take a systemic approach to their work, with a recent example being the development with partners of the [Anti-Racism Touring Rider](#).

None of these initiatives have fixed the system. Inequality and intolerable barriers still exist, but they have all had and are having a systemic impact aligned with their missions and in addition to their previous programme of work.

Initiatives to tackle the challenges
And **people make it work** are developing three new programmes to address systemic issues.

- [Suzanne Alleyne](#) is working in partnership with us to devise an Organisation Development Skills programme, with and for cultural workers of colour - both employed and freelance - so that the workforce is expanded by a more representative group, skilled and committed to help the sector change and develop.
- We are creating the Office for Leadership Transition with [Sandeep Mahal](#) to enable cultural organisations to transition their leadership (both people and practices) allowing new perspectives, new people, new forms and more openness. With a range of expert services, protocols and transition practices, as well as cohort-based programmes, positive action initiatives and governance / culture change support, the Office will offer a broad range of services and experiences so that new leaders can get in and get on.
- We are building a programme with [Anisa Morridadi](#) and Beatfreeks to transform Governance in the cultural sector, with direct support for individual trustees, collective support for organisations and a campaign to enable a broad range of under-represented groups to get access to our sectors' board rooms. The programme is designed to be truly transformational.

We are inviting involvement in all these initiatives - whether you are a collaborator, a funder, a participant or a critic. If these programmes don't speak to your needs right now, access our [free tools](#) instead, which might support you as you develop your own responses. Do share your thoughts and help us support the cultural sector to change and develop.

Richard Watts is CEO at **people make it work**.

***people make it 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.*

*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.*

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

[Feature](#) [Management](#) [Cross.artform](#) [Leadership](#) [Regeneration](#)

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Comments

Tony Haynes replied on 23 Jul 2021 [Permalink](#)

Systemic conversation

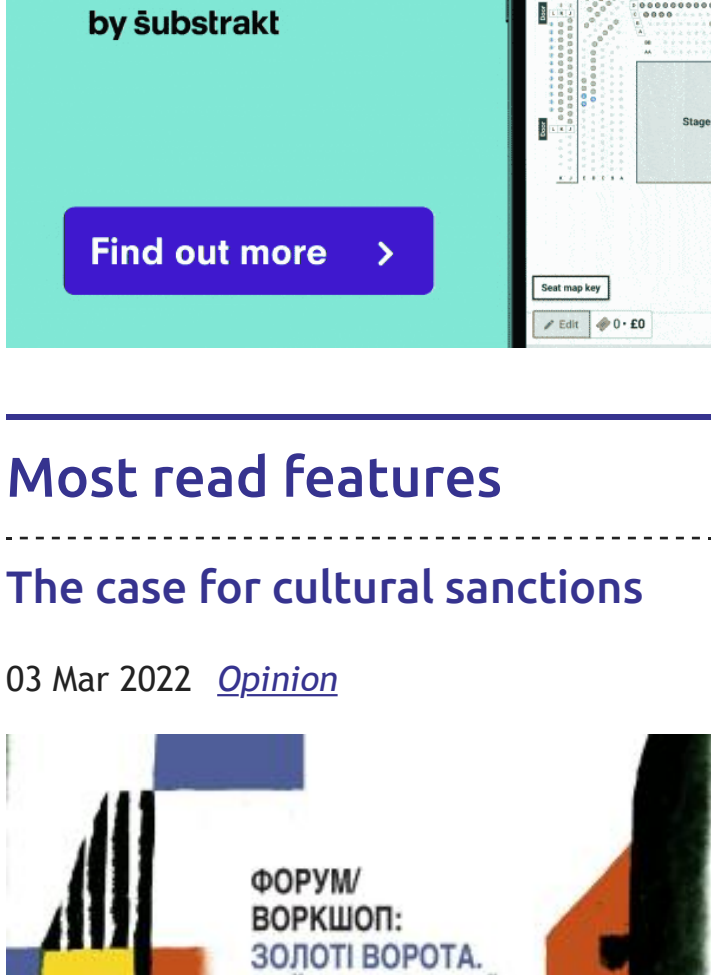
When 'improved governance' or 'more dispersed models of leadership' have manifestly failed to have any impact for years, how are they suddenly going to make any difference? If there is to 'lasting transformative change', to cite another favourite cliché, that can only be achieved by creative artists, working in collaboration perhaps with progressive or reformed cultural institutions. The problem is that the management of most institutions (how close the Barbican can be accused of racism?) is timid in its programming and outreach projects; and their Boards - and even worse the Trustees and Advisers of influential Foundations - are completely out of touch with reality, while ironically they claim to value 'lived experience', authenticity and relevance! (George Orwell, thou shouldst be living at this hour...) Do they have any idea of what art is, what it is for, who it is for, who creates it and why? Instead, they devise prescriptive schemes, requiring artists to create programmes to address particular social or personal issues when this is what serious artists do anyway - and in a way that is stimulating, inspiring and moving. I was recently challenged by a leading Foundation to describe what success would look like, in response to a funding proposal. When I asked in return what success would look like for their scheme they declined to answer. Unsurprisingly, our application was rejected. These are matters that need to be debated openly and without rancour if there is to be any progress in solving the conundrums, dilemmas and contradictions that Covid-19 has served up. Challenging it may be, but stimulating for all those who genuinely love art and respect artists.

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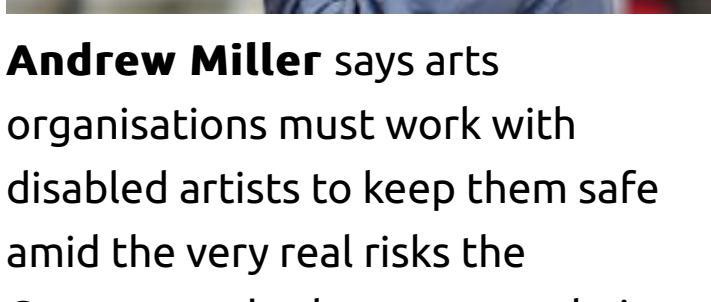
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Head of Marketing and Audiences

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Salary: £45,000 - £50,000 (per annum)

Head of Transformation

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

Programme Director

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

Artistic Director

East Midlands
Salary: £42,000 - £45,000 (per annum)

Head of Human Resources (part time)

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

Senior Leader (Operations)

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

Executive Producer

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

General Manager

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

Creative Engagement Manager

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

Artistic Director

South West
Salary: £80,000 - £85,000 (per annum)

Creative Director and Arts Centre Manager

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

Programme Manager

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

Ticket Sales Manager

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

Music Events Manager

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

Artistic Director Joint CEO

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

Director & Chief Executive

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

Director

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

Head of Finance and Administration

North West
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Digital Content Producer

North West
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Chair of the Board

South West

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