

## Recognising the emotional impact of organisational change

It's useful for museums and galleries going through a process of organisational change to see what other types of cultural organisations have experienced. Between 2007 and 2010 the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) went through major organisational and cultural transformation, and the three-year process is insightfully reported on in *All Together: A Creative Approach to Organisational Change* by Robert Hewison, John Holden and Samuel Jones (Demos 2010). This is probably the best case study of organisational change in a cultural organisation. There are useful lessons here for all of us, though some of them act as a reality check.

Among the general lessons, drawn from many change programmes, are:

- Organisational change, if it succeeds at all, takes at least five years
- Seventy-five percent of attempts at change fail
- Change is a continuous process, an evolution, not necessarily a pre-determined programme of change: "If you know where you are going completely and from the start, it does not work"
- Change is an incremental approach achieved by small steps whose full significance often appears only in retrospect.

One of the most interesting aspects of the RSC's process was the unusual focus on the importance of emotional engagement in sustaining change: for change to become embedded, it is not enough to rely simply on logic and analysis. You must acknowledge the emotional impact of the process on the people involved.

The RSC used the concept of 'ensemble' to bring about change across the whole organisation, which had been suffering from very low morale. Artistic Director Michael Boyd argued that this approach requires a set of behaviours which are the moral values of 'ensemble', a sort of guiding star by which people can coordinate their individual contributions. These behaviours are:

**Cooperation:** the intense and unobstructed traffic between artists at play, that also surrenders to the connection with others even while making demands on ourselves.

**Altruism:** the moral imagination and the social perception to see that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is about the stronger helping the weaker, not the weaker being choreographed to make the stronger look good.

**Trust:** otherwise you are not going to be able to experiment or be honest without fear.

**Empathetic curiosity:** caring for others with a forensic curiosity that seeks new ways of being together and creating together.

**Imagination:** and time for that imagination, so that we can keep ideas in the mind long enough to allow them to emerge from the alchemy of the imagination rather than the factory of the will.

**Compassion:** engaging with the world and each other, knowing that there may well be mutual pain in doing so.

**Tolerance and forgiveness:** to allow mistakes and recover from very big mistakes.

**Humility:** the person who has nothing to learn is certainly incapable of creative dialogue.

**Magnanimity:** the courage to give away your ideas.

**Love:** the ability to be inspired by your whole self and by the whole self of others.

**Rapport:** the magic language between individuals in tune with each other.

**Patience:** only really possible and only really called upon in a company that stays together this long... Patience to develop relationships with each other as fellow artists... The patience to stalk the big beast and achieve what only we can achieve.

**Diversity:** far from imposing homogeneity, a true ensemble requires dynamic difference.

It's unusual to see senior management unafraid to use words like 'love', 'humility' and 'compassion'. And which of these behaviours is inapplicable to museums and galleries? Surely none are, and most are central to the work of museums and galleries (e.g. cooperation, trust, empathetic curiosity, imagination, diversity, patience) as we reach out to diverse communities, try to understand our communities' needs, experiment with new approaches, share feelings of ownership and pride, encourage different voices, and encourage staff and communities to challenge our assumptions, disagree and speak freely and openly without fear.

Fear is perhaps the one emotion that is not focused on very much in the RSC report – even though Artistic Director Michael Boyd talked openly about fear, even terror, during the process. Fear is one of the biggest barriers to sustainable organisational change: fear of risk, fear of being blamed, fear of losing your job, fear of your role being undermined, fear of doing something you don't want to do, fear of the lack of certainty. This MUST be acknowledged, and staff, volunteers, board members and community partners supported through the process.

Change will not happen and will not be sustainable without all these elements, because they are about the way people work, what they feel about their work and how they relate to each other. And all of these require putting an understanding of emotions at the centre of organisational change.

Author: Piotr Bienkowski

Download the *All Together* report from Demos here:  
[http://www.demos.co.uk/files/All\\_Together.pdf?1268865772](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/All_Together.pdf?1268865772)

