

## **Reflective practice**

For some time there has been a moral imperative  
for publicly funded institutions  
to consult with their stakeholders,  
whether they're in education or in health  
or in the cultural sector.

However, we've now got a new imperative  
where we must collaborate,  
and that is to do with adaptation.

We are looking at a situation  
where resources have dwindled  
and are unlikely to increase.

so now we have to co-operate,

We have to share resources  
and this is where reflective practice comes into its own.

Reflective practice is the moment of stepping back  
and looking at what worked, what didn't work,  
how can we make this work better,  
based on the assumption that you will be working together.

You will be developing how you work together  
because that is your priority,  
is to look at how you collaborate.

I'll tell you what it is not. It is not navel-gazing.

It's not just talking to ourselves,  
absolutely, it's not that in museums.

It's on the basis that museums  
are incapable of changing themselves.

It is most critically a conversation  
between museums and their stakeholders.  
This is a central element.  
It's an on-going organisational learning process  
that feeds back into planning and action.  
So it is never an end in itself,  
otherwise, what's the point?  
On that basis, it's absolutely central  
to what the organisation does.  
In any publicly funded organisation  
this is absolutely central.  
OK, here's an example of how  
reflective practice can work.  
An arts organisation, a gallery,  
has a long term relationship  
with the neighbourhood.  
The neighbourhood is frustrated  
with the way the gallery  
has been working for them, not with them.  
The gallery has its funding threatened  
in terms of its public impact.  
They get together and they have  
an intense session of reflective practice.  
They look at the experience,  
and out of that, the leader of the community  
neighbourhood committee said,  
"Why don't we do a five year plan together?"

As neighbours, you need us, we need you.

Let's look at how we could plan together."

That's the outcome of effective reflective practice.

Within any work that the museum is engaged in

in collaboration with its community partners,

there must be, within that cycle,

points at which reflective practice is built in.

This is absolutely essential,

so there's time to do something about it

by looking at what's working, not working?

How is it for you?

What are the dynamics of what's going on?

Where does power work in all of this?

Is it working in subtle ways?

Are there things that we need to address?

We have to address that while we're doing it,

so that we could actually shift it

before it's too late.

It isn't only a looking back process.

It's a during process.

It's a before, during, middle, after process;

on-going, cyclical process.

There's something that I want to say here

that's terribly important.

Reflective practice won't fix an organisation

that isn't committed to participatory ways of working.

If the organisation is fundamentally

not committed to this way of working,  
reflecting on it will only point that out  
and make it more acutely visible.

How is that going to help?

It may help in an organisation  
that thinks it's participatory  
and finds out through a process  
of honest reflective practice  
that in fact, it's not working so well,  
and in fact, we need to change.

But just putting in a process of reflective practice  
as something bolted on  
won't work if you're not committed.

And if you're not committed, my friends,

I'm not sure that that museum is going to survive.

How do you even think you have a right to be preserved?

You know, Peter Singer in the States,  
he's the big organisations man, a big guru,  
he's just come out and said,

"Forget funding museums and galleries."

When if I'm now looking  
at public funding shrinking to that level,  
I can't articulate why they're important  
and they're not articulating why they're important.

So you know, it used to be

a community member one time said,

"You need us more than we need you."

Well, I think there is "we need each other" here,  
but unless we're having that discussion,  
as central, as core to what the organisation does  
as a natural part of its working,  
then we can never articulate that.

That's absolutely critical,  
that we're having that conversation.

We should be having it all the time!

This idea that it takes time  
out of our normal working is an absurdity.

It is our normal working.

It's absolutely central to it!

I know local authorities,  
huge local authorities here in London  
who do this kind of work all the time.

They're working with disability,  
they're working with disability activist organisations,  
as central to the decision making  
of the allocation of budgets for that work.

Of course!

These are stakeholder involvement...