

SEIZING PERMISSION:

THE TLC TORONTO INITIATIVE

Written & Compiled by: Anne Dunning, Jane Marsland & Nello McDaniel

TLC Toronto is an initiative of:

theatre
dance
opera
toronto
alliance
for the
performing
arts

METCALF
FOUNDATION



Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des arts
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

TORONTO
ARTS
COUNCIL

Contents

Introduction

Emerging Themes, Issues and Approaches

Dimensional Thinking and Planning

Reframing the System

Optimizing Transition/Mitigating Disruption

Seizing Permission: Balancing Authority with Responsibility

Offering Experiences/Perpetuating Relationships

Observations, Analysis and Insights

Leading From the Center

The Artistic Process, The Emergent Process

Community, Connection and Safe Space

The Right Tools for the Job

The Cycle and Pattern of Change: Time as Resource

Conclusions & Recommendations

Understand & Rethink Disruption

Start with the Leaders

Address the Resource Distribution Problem

APPENDIX A: Why the TLC Toronto Initiative

APPENDIX B: The TLC Toronto Cohorts – Cygnus & Andromeda

Introduction

Theatres Leading Change Toronto continues a body of work exploring and learning from practitioner-led change that we have been pursuing since 2009. At that time, in response to a resounding outcry in the arts sector of *'the old model is broken, what is the new model?'* we felt it was important to recognize and value the ongoing work that arts leaders were doing to develop and implement change in their own organizations. At the same time, we believed it was important to dispel the notion that a single 'new model' for arts organizations would be a panacea for the field or a positive agent for change in all organizations. Like many who work closely with and in the arts leadership structure, we understand that the enormous diversity of needs, intentions and underlying artistic processes require not the simplification of a singular model but rather the complexity of the many different approaches and structures that arts leaders discover and develop in order to most effectively create and connect their work in a changing environment. TLC Toronto was a consortium built around the notion that we can best understand what works in terms of organizational change from the leaders in the field and their experience, expertise, instinct and insights.

Launching a consortium learning initiative is somewhat like starting out on an ensemble creative process. When we begin, all we know is the group of collaborators we have chosen to work with and the basic frame we have established for the work we want to do together – in the case of Theatres Leading Change Toronto 'exploring practitioner-led change'. What emerges over a period of group engagement and independent work is often as unexpected and delightful to us as the performances that emerge from a collaborative theatre team.

Almost always, a part of what emerges is a sense of camaraderie and community. There is a lot of talk in our contemporary world about community such that it has, in a lot of contexts, become meaningless. But true community, with its shared values, sense of mutual responsibility and democratic ownership is increasingly rare. This type of community cannot be engineered. It must evolve naturally amongst its members as trust and understanding are developed. The TLC Toronto consortia have developed in such a way that, at pivotal moments, it became apparent that a nascent community was growing. We have been particularly gratified that leaders from within TLC Toronto have continued to build this community even after the formal TLC work ended by gathering around and furthering action on critical discourse and a new play development system.

After two years of work with these varied arts organizations and leaders in Toronto, what has emerged is some truly meaningful thinking and work around the most urgent and often persistent issues in the sector - from resource distribution to audience development to how structures sustain or inhibit the work to the nature of collaborative creation both within and between organizations. The TLC Toronto leaders were willing to think expansively and set aside the status quo such that we ended up not with a series of inward-looking approaches but rather with ideas that often connected throughout the sector, deeply within neighbourhoods and communities or broadly across sectors. We have been inspired by the creativity and resilience of these arts professionals and their organizations and are proud to share the insights we have gained from their ideas, approaches and thinking in this report.

Emerging Themes, Issues and Approaches

Dimensional Thinking and Planning

Traditionally, planning has emphasized linear chronological thinking, which simultaneously encourages projecting the immediate past onto the future (hindsight), while idealizing or romanticizing future scenarios that are disconnected from the complex realities of the present and unknown exigencies of a rolling future. Such straight-line thinking and planning is one insidious way in which the status quo protects and perpetuates itself, intentionally and unintentionally.

We have observed that very deliberate efforts and actions are helpful in mitigating the natural tendencies of straight-line thinking and opening non-linear and multi-dimensional thinking and planning. This allows for an integration of appropriate elements of past, present and future into genuine *insight* that neither perpetuates the status quo nor fantasizes an improbable future. Insight comes from connecting the dots – relationships, opportunities, patterns and possibilities - and results in a more complex, multi-dimensional and textured view of one's current and evolving realities. It is a far more useful and resilient planning and problem-solving platform than hindsight. Often, insight arrives unannounced and unexpected, in an endorphin-spiked "A-ha! moment." And in such moments, insight can imperceptibly morph into foresight, a more complex view of the present moving into the future.

Specific techniques and tools can stimulate multi-dimensional thinking and planning. One of the tools we have developed specifically for the arts sector is the Organization Profile. We describe this as an internal, timeless draft document that captures an organization's core values, vision and ambitions. When defined and articulated clearly, these elements create a field of possibilities and a focused means of navigating a changing environment that are resistant to linear

thinking and amenable to multi-dimensional approaches. Likewise, for many leaders mapping techniques place thinking and planning onto a spatial plane where relationships trump hierarchies, chronologies and sequencing. By introducing non-linear tools like these and promoting interaction and knowledge exchange, TLC Toronto generated a safe space for, otherwise unlikely, shared insights and endless potential for *a-ha!* moments.

Unspun Theatre: Developing Context, Expanding Perspectives

Unspun had been working organically and responsively for a long time. When faced with the challenge of articulating how they work and considering the intentionality of their approaches, they relied on the tools that encouraged them in dimensional thinking and planning practices.

“The organizational profile really illuminated key areas that we don’t know how to talk about yet – what our philosophy is and what our work is really about. The focus on finding the right language for us is an important piece that we’re still working our way through. We’ve spent a lot of time talking and working on the questions around the profile, and it’s very much a work in progress. We’re still having trouble finding language that feels right to describe Shira’s position in the company, as well as a working mandate. It’s something that we’ll be working on continually.”

Chris Hanratty, Artistic Director & Shira Leuchter, General Manager

**Nightswimming:
A Community of Audiences**

Nightswimming’s experience in the TLC is an example of how dimensional thinking and planning helped a theatre reframe their change initiative, expand the theatre’s vision field and integrate effective responses and actions.

“Rupal found the mapping process very productive and central to assisting us in identifying a number of relevant issues that the company should address. . . Brian found the organizational profile writing process to be very beneficial.

Nightswimming participated in this initiative as a means of helping us reformulate a number of organizational elements in preparation for a huge project entitled City of Wine. However, by the time the TLC sessions began, the City of Wine project had met with substantial changes; it was no longer proceeding as we had imagined, and the institutional refinements we had been designing were no longer central to our plans. As a result, we shifted our focus to a more immediate, ongoing, and important discussion we had been having in the company about how Nightswimming can manage and connect more effectively with the “community of audiences” that engage with our theatrical work.

Perhaps the best thing that happened is that the TLC process asked us to name this initiative: by asking us to consider what we needed to address (and in fact what we were already addressing in a number of unrelated ways), we were able to bring together our thinking about events, donors, creation, and social media in a way that was specific to our needs and activities – rather than using templates or approaches designed for other companies. As a result, the “community of audiences” idea has helped us integrate thinking about audiences into our artistic planning and help us consider how much effort to place in various areas.”

Brian Quirt, Artistic Director and Rupal Shah, Producer

Reframing the system

In the nonprofit arts sector, we have been dealing with issues of scarcity for a long time. There is never enough and survival is a continual struggle both for individuals trying to make their lives as arts professionals and for the institutions we have established to support and connect artists and their work to audiences. We certainly talk a lot about the scarcity of resources – financial, human, arts facilities - but scarcity also extends into our dialog about audiences, critical discourse and societal value around artists and their work. Much of the dialogue that has taken place in the field over the past couple of decades has been directed by the mindset of ‘how do we create more?’ How do we create more audiences for our performances? How do we create more interest in what we do? How do we create more funding for our organizations? How do we create more talented and dedicated arts leaders? How do we create more facilities in which the arts can be developed and shared? While progress has been made, we continue to circle back to these same issues over and over again. More, it seems, cannot be created.

Interestingly, within the framework of the TLC Toronto process, several of the participating arts entities looked at scarcity challenges through a different lens. Instead of continuing to struggle with how to create more within a closed system, they opted to reframe the system. What we mean by this is that they opened the scope of the issue by redefining the boundaries of what they were trying to achieve. Instead of focusing narrowly, for example, on building an audience for one theatre entity, they considered how they could be a part of building engagement in the performing arts. Instead of trying to figure out how to sustain an arts centre, they focused on building a community-supported public space.

Our mechanistic thinking is so often an impediment to deriving solutions in a systemic and holistic world. As we followed the thinking of the arts leaders we worked with, we realized how often we frustrate ourselves by trying to fix something that is, when we reframe it and view it differently, really an integrated part of a larger system that will never be functional in isolation.

We were truly excited to see how arts leaders are able to turn scarcity into abundance by reframing their issues not as isolated concerns but as components of a larger system, create new approaches that are already showing promise in creating a more resilient performing arts sector.

The Theatre Centre:
Social Discourse Incubator

The Theatre Centre went through one of the most dramatic changes during the TLC process, completing construction and occupying their new space on Queen Street West in Toronto.

As the new facility became a reality, they transformed their thinking not only about the building and how it would be used but also about their programming and how it would be transformed by the new space.

“By intention, the Theatre Centre’s commitment to incubating theatre as the heart of its mission has not changed. While there is great opportunity to engage this work within a larger whole, the essence of how the Theatre Centre approaches this work and supports the artists with whom we work has remained. At the same time, the new space and growing vision of the organization has reframed how we think about and position the Theatre Centre. Decisions about accessibility and interconnectivity within the building are significant in creating the environment to realize the vision of the Social Discourse Incubator in that we are committed, beyond just providing resources to the artists we work with to create a truly ‘public space’ from the seating area on the stairs at the front of the building to the open café – with flexible furnishings and a permeable connection to the sidewalk and park beyond – to the arts park and green roof spaces.”

Franco Boni, Artistic Director & Roxanne Duncan, Managing Director

Volcano Theatre:
Lava Dome

Volcano Theatre’s Lava Dome project started from an internal organizational need – to identify housing space for artists and other resources in the community. By connecting with others through personal networks, Volcano was able not only to fill the immediate need but also to recognize the resource of having a community network of available non-cash resources that would make it easier for all arts community members to connect with these resources when they need them. Thus, the platform of Lava Dome which serves not only as a resource on a broader scale and an income generator (still in early stages) for Volcano but also as a demonstration of the sometimes untapped abundance of the community and its connections.

“At Volcano, we see our role as a connector, bringing experts in various practices together; and an ambassador, presenting an idea of Canada to the world. We explore compelling social and artistic territories in innovative ways, moving across cultural and national borders to forge partnerships, and to create stories.

The Lava Dome is an idea that grew out of a long-standing Volcano service that has been central to our mandate: The Housing List. After more than 10 successful years, we figured it was time to give the Housing List a home of its own.

The Lava Dome takes that original idea and expands the service to offer useful, timely information and services for the arts community. Art is about connection: connecting ideas, connecting skills, connecting people. By creating a platform for some of our community's most basic needs – homes, resources, creation space, professional development – in a format that is easy to search and understand, we hope to help connect you with the people and resources you need the most.”

Ross Manson, Artistic Director

**Théâtre Français de Toronto:
Community Leaders**

Like many long-established arts institutions, Théâtre Français de Toronto, found themselves at a juncture at which they were both reflecting on their relevance in a contemporary cultural environment and addressing the very real challenges of sustaining an institution with limited resources.

“We began with a question about programming – did we, as a long-established theatre company need to revisit the way we develop and present our programming within the contemporary context of Toronto? As ‘the’ French language theatre company in Toronto, Tft has maintained a diverse programming approach to address the needs of all French language theatregoers. As more organizations have emerged to produce French theatre and francophone cultural opportunities in the city, we wanted to understand if our place in the community had shifted and if we needed to re-examine some of the ‘givens’ around our programming approach.

At the same time, with the financial challenges of sustaining the organization, we had developed a more inward-looking perspective, focusing our decisions and goals on the needs of the organization. What we discovered as we talked about programming is that Tft is not working in isolation but is part of (and in fact we hope as a leader within) a larger francophone cultural community. This opened our eyes to the possibilities of working with and supporting our colleagues in ways that would expand audiences and support the creation and production of more francophone work, expanding the impact of francophone culture in Toronto and, at the same time, rejuvenating Tft’s important role and relevance within the fabric of our community.”

Guy Mignaut, Artistic Director & Ghislain Caron, Managing Director

Optimizing Transition, Mitigating Disruption

Waiting for ideal times and opportunities to make organizational change and transition can feel somewhat akin to waiting for Godot. There is never an ideal time, so opportunities for change and transition have to be identified and created. While we think of transitions as significant events in the life of arts organizations (e.g. key leadership change) there are numerous transition moments that occur ongoing. The creative *and* operating life of any arts organization unfolds in fits and starts. Rather than gliding through extended periods of seamless stasis, the reality for most organizations is one of punctuated periods of interruptions and ‘shifting gears’. These include expected transition moments (e.g. the conclusion of one project and beginning of the next) or unexpected moments (e.g. the sudden departure of a key staff member). No matter the impetus for change, we believe that these transition moments can and should be seized as opportunities to create positive change.

In times of transition organizations can be especially open to change and these junctures therefore become opportunities for leadership to insert or leverage planned and needed changes. Thinking of all transition moments as opportunities for transformation helps leadership to respond proactively to disruptions as they happen. Unlike expected and even unexpected transition moments, disruptions demand change and can range from annoyances (crashing computers) to major crises (an opening night theatre flood). Disruptions tend to trigger emotional and reactive responses that result in implementation of changes out of context and at inopportune moments. This in turn can lead to serial reactive responses that can quickly pull an organization off-center. Echoing a trend in corporate culture of intentional disruption – with the expectation of yielding ‘disruptive innovation’ - some in the nonprofit sector are intentionally throwing their organizations into a state of disruption. While novel, this approach seems to confuse distraction with productive development. Disruptions can’t be eliminated and certainly shouldn’t be invited or created, but they can be mitigated and even be turned to advantage when arts professionals become more proactive in utilizing transition moments. The more disruptions can be viewed as and dealt with as transition moments the more all consequences of disruption can be absorbed without organizational distortion resulting.

WhyNot Theatre:
Owning the Organization

WhyNot Theatre came into the TLC process at a transitional moment – not so much a crisis or disruption but a moment in

which artistic director, Ravi Jain, was trying to reconcile the ambition of the organization with the organization's resources and the challenges of the environment. Ravi recognized that a change was necessary to sustainably and effectively deliver his vision but he was struggling to define and direct the transition that was needed. Through the process, he engaged deeply in understanding the drivers for WhyNot and the factors that defined and limited the organization and its work. Although he ended up moving toward a nonprofit structure (which at the outset he had rejected, having seen the limitations imposed on other arts entities) he did so in a way that was proactive rather than reactive and that allowed him to define and control how he would use the structure to achieve the ends he desired for WhyNot.

"I was looking for alternative structures and new ways of functioning as an independent artist with a company. We looked at many different ways - however over the course of the year, I ended up doing a complete 180 and becoming a not for profit and getting operating funding. However, what is exciting, is that in doing so, I am driving forward into challenging what it means to be an operating client. I am going to effect change by doing more to show people that more is possible as an operating client, including proposing new structures and ways for us to function."

Ravi Jain, Artistic Director

**A Tale of Two Crises: Lessons
Learned About Disruptive Change**

Two of the participating groups in the TLC Toronto helped underscore for us the striking difference between transition and disruption due to separate but related experiences. As a result we were reminded of and learned more about effects of disruption, indeed crisis, on the life source and continuity of arts organizations. And we were once again reminded of the limitations of this particular working format on organizations experiencing, reacting to and recovering from disruptive change and crisis.

One group entered TLC Toronto having experienced a very public change in leadership crisis; the other experienced a clash between artistic and board leadership in the latter phase of the TLC work. In both instances there was unquestionable value in the groups' participation in the consortium, however, the actual change and transition desired by the professionals in both instances was limited at best, to impossible at worst.

With regard to the group coming out of leadership crisis: At the outset, although there had been a fairly smooth and accepted leadership change, we feared that this group was still too close to the disruption to be able to fully participate and benefit from the TLC process. On the other hand, there was clearly a great deal of support of the new artistic leadership on all fronts and we all agreed that timing was right and good for

introducing transitional change to move the organization in new and more positive directions within the community.

This transitional change proved challenging to achieve. Depending on the degree of disruptive change involved, there is a protracted period of post-disruption trauma and recovery response that seeks to freeze any new changes in the wake of substantial change that has occurred. The desire for complete calm following complete turmoil is a natural human response, and one especially sought by the board of this organization. But just as aftershocks follow in the wake of a major earthquake, a whole range of changes always follow a major seismic event in an organization. For an arts organization the more those aftershock changes can be anticipated and either positively directed or diverted the better. We now understand that a more concentrated intervention process would have been far more in line with the aftershocks of the disruption and crisis experienced prior to the Initiative.

With regard to the second organization, there were numerous signs and indications of potential disruption as we started the TLC Toronto work. The professional leadership's participation in process was active, honest and in terms of the TLC Toronto change initiative expectation, rich, thorough and thoughtful. But it was perhaps the positive nature of the process itself, and the board's appearance of supporting the process direction, that obscured the fomenting conditions within the board leadership and ultimately failed to anticipate the unilateral disruptive actions taken by the board in removing the artistic leadership. It may have been the case that nothing could be done to avert the board's approach to disrupting the organization through abrupt leadership change but a concentrated intervention process might have made for a more satisfactory transitional change serving the interest of all far more effectively.

Seizing Permission: Balancing Authority with Responsibility

We have consistently observed that one of the greatest barriers to change in any organization are the existing structures, expectations and ways of working that, while established to support the organization's work, have become ill adapted to serve emerging realities and intentions. Overcoming entrenched ways of working requires leaders to acknowledge and use their authority to transform their own organizational realities.

For the past forty years, the dominant organizational format has been the incorporated non profit organization with charitable status. This format provided public and private funders with the legal accountability they desired when making financial contributions grants. At the same time, it demands delivery and accountability and cultivates rigid ways of working and complex procedures to ensure that risk is managed out of the processes of the organization. The format is

predicated on maintaining a consistent level of annual operations, which was somewhat possible when there were sufficient resources in the arts funding system to support sustained annual activity. However, with the lack of growth in the arts funding system, most arts organizations are now severely under-capitalized and straining to achieve their expected level of annual activities. This format has many traps for arts professionals working in today's funding realities. Two perilous traps are the institutional mindset and the relentless drive for growth with its attendant aversion to risk and failure. The institutional mindset often leads to confusion about who is responsible for leading the organization with much of the nonprofit literature on governance supporting a hierarchical organizational structure with the board of directors charged with setting the vision and mission of the organization. This viewpoint is often too rigid and too risk adverse to fit the needs of entrepreneurial artists.

In view of these challenges, there has been a growing body of work exploring alternatives to the nonprofit charitable institutional structure. In spite of the increasingly open dialogue about these issues, few examples exist of arts entities who have implemented new structures in practice.

As TLC Toronto progressed it was encouraging to see participants begin to question the orthodoxies of this system and consider other options that might better serve their needs. . Once they slipped the bonds of the institutional mindset, they were no longer constrained by the old ways of doing things or confined by the idea that they had to ask permission to initiate needed changes for the health of the organization. Further, being part of a learning network enabled many of the participants to 'seize permission' and establish changes because they felt supported by their peers in the network.

**Volcano Theatre: From Board to
Project Resource Teams**

Ross Manson found that the focus of board members was moving away from the need to develop resources for the work and to achieve the mission of the organization. He decided to reduce the number of board members and develop Project Resource Teams for each work under development.

"Each resource team is a group of volunteers who have come together to support the development and production of a specific show. These volunteers will form a department of that production, and collectively they will further the needs of the show: primarily in terms of fundraising and networking, but not limited to these activities. The show will be the thing and the team will make sure it goes on. Being a team member should feel considerably different from being on a board of directors. Teams will be closer to their productions. They will also have no liability, and no concerns for by-laws or corporate governance.

Meetings will be more informal, often virtual. How often and how they come together will be up to the teams to decide."

Ross Manson, Artistic Director & Meredith Potter, General Manager

Nova Dance: Defying Expectations

Nova Bhattacharya's journey has, on many levels, been defined by defying and redefining expectations. She has, throughout her career given herself permission to take a path that was not proscribed or expected – leading the way for others to follow. As a classical bharatanatyam dancer she was told that she could not have a career as a dancer. Combining her training with her passion for contemporary dance, she created her own path to a professional dance career. As she and administrative partner, Meredith Potter began the work with TLC, they were struggling with the expectations of maintaining an operating company with resources that were more akin to project support. They created a way forward for Nova Dance that focused on the work and the relationships they wanted and needed with a 'family' of audience and supporters and not on creating structures or approaches that were 'expected' of an operating company. Perhaps most indicative of this change and the sense of personal empowerment and confidence it encompassed was the transformation of the name of the company from the more institutional 'Ipsita Nova Dance Company' to the personal 'Nova Dance'.

"As Meredith puts it, we embraced a life-style change. Simplified our brand and messaging. We continue on an ongoing basis to implement the new approach to all areas of activity. Outcomes are hard to itemize at this point, but certainly we have received positive feedback on the name change and images. From the inside, it does feel a little more bolshie, a little more maverick, a little more "this is the way WE are going to do things – so there!" and all of this does keep the art at the centre."

Nova Bhattacharya, Artistic Director & Meredith Potter, General Manager

Community Initiative: New Play Development

One of the priorities identified as a persistent community issue for both the venue based theatres and the independent theatre community was the need to create greater clarity around how they collaborate artistically. As the arts funding system is ever more stretched by the numbers of artists entering the system, the need to share resources has become paramount.

A working group formed to develop language and definitions around artistic partnerships, to determine the partnership models that would best address the needs of both the independent theatre creator and the venue based theatre partner and ensure greater transparency around the different models and how risk is shared.

As part of these conversations, Andy McKim, Artistic Director of Theatre Passe Muraille, developed a Collaborative Play Development Manifesto in order to articulate the beliefs and values that must be embraced to support and ensure the creation of quality work in the changing environment for new play development.

Why Not Theatre is exploring another way of supporting emerging artists to create new work through a community process of new work development. Ravi Jain, Artistic Director, established the Independent Creators Cooperative, an innovative approach to use the administrative platforms of established theatres to support and mentor emerging theatre creators. In the first iteration of process, Why Not Theatre and Theatre Smith-Gilmour, combined resources to produce Ahuri Theatre, Play it Again Productions and ZOU Theatre for a six-week run in the BMO Incubator Space at The Theatre Centre. As the project continues to evolve, it is becoming a community residency approach to new work development that will bring together senior operating companies with emerging theatre creators.

Offering Experiences/Perpetuating Relationships

As in all of our working cohorts, the TLC Toronto initiative included several groups who were addressing the challenges of engaging audiences (Acting Up, Nova Dance, TDT, Nightswimming). Within the context of this work, however, they did not gravitate toward the usual approaches focused on marketing and branding and audience demographics. Instead, the TLC Toronto groups started to explore the relationships they had with audiences and the nature of the experiences people have with the work. This led to approaches that are targeted, intimate and connected both within their organizations and in their broader communities. Not only were these new approaches more manageable for the arts entities to undertake, they are proving promising in creating stronger, longer-lasting connections and impacting the work and the organizations in unique ways – from a new understanding of how patrons might be immersed in the process of creating dance to a new perspective on what we mean by a ‘season’ and how our mindset about a season might differ from the perspective of those we are hoping will participate.

Toronto Dance Theatre:
Tour de Danse

TDT’s relationship with audience and supporters has changed over time. Recognizing that, with limited public funding, the relationship with existing supporters and the connection to new

potential supporters is pivotal to the future health of the company, TDT embraced new approaches to connecting with its community through both experiential engagement and relationship development.

They started by piloting “Tour de Danse”, a dance experience for audience members/supporters to create a personal connection to dance and the work of TDT. This program was designed to engage 25 supporters in a process of learning/creating dance work, which they went on to perform alongside members of the company for an audience of friends.

The Company is planning to develop an Interactive User’s Guide to Contemporary Dance, a demonstration and workshop program for the non-dancer to provide context and enhance their understanding and experience of dance. The goal is to create confidence in the viewer and increase their level of engagement in and curiosity about the art form. Eventually, this entry point and the Tour de Danse program, with other related initiatives, will provide an arc of experience in which to engage dance patrons.

At the same time, the company seeks to build new relationships through an ambassadors program. The intention is both to build a network within potentially dance-curious communities in order to engage new audiences for dance work and to extend TDT’s relationships in the performing and visual arts communities in mutually supportive and resource-sharing relationships.

Acting Up Stage: Loyalty & Personalized Communication

Acting Up’s relationship with its audiences was very focused on marketing and subscription packaging at the outset of the TLC process. The company had experienced a number of successful shows and, as they began to offer multiple productions in a year, this seasonal branding model was the one that they were advised to undertake. However, the audience did not seem to be interested in buying subscription packaging and the year focused on multiple-show marketing yielded the lowest attendance in the company's history.

“We used the TLC process as an opportunity to better understand our current audiences. Through this process, we resolved to create a more complex set of audience segmentation strategies that would allow us to sustain and deepen our relationships. After segmenting the audience into three distinct groups, the company built a loyalty program for approximately 500 core audience members, giving them similar benefits to the previous subscription package with more opportunities for in-person relationship building. The two other groups were segmented based on attendance frequency, with a marketing plan focused on one-show at a time, using past behaviour as a guide for marketing message that will attract the individual reader. With this new plan, Acting Up Stage Company dismantled the seasonal structure branding, and refocused marketing resources away from mass marketing initiatives and into managing increased internal audience

messaging. Moving forward, the intention is to build stronger loyalty and more repeat business using simpler and personalized communication strategies.”

Mitchell Marcus, Artistic Director

Observations, Analysis and Insights

As noted at the outset, the TLC Toronto consortium represents a continuation of a body of work firmly grounded in our belief that arts professionals are best suited to understand, envision, conceptualize and enact the innovation and change that they need. In this belief we reject the notion that arts professionals need to be convinced or taught how to change and are somehow oblivious to their evolving best interests. But we are also aware of how complex and sometimes risky systemic organizational and community change can be, especially given the multitude of forces constantly at work resisting change. What we were able to affirm, observe and learn reflects the robust, complex and inter-related factors supporting and enabling change within the sector..

Leading From the Center

Uniformly in the TLC Toronto outcomes we observed that the roles, relationships and success of the professional arts leadership and the organization were inextricably linked. We know from years of experience that artists don't need to be taught how to lead – mostly they need to be supported to apply what they already know as artists and directors to their organizations. As different leaders have different styles, each must concentrate on identifying and positioning her/himself to lead the organization in her/his own style. For some arts professionals, this simply confirms something they have always believed, so they quickly and confidently step into the leadership role. For others, fully assuming overt leadership requires time and reminders, sometimes permission and sometimes a process of changing behaviour. But consistently we observed that the instinct and impulse to lead in individual and appropriate ways emerged throughout.

The Artistic Process, The Emergent Process,

A centrepiece of all our work is our profound belief in the artistic process as the most effective framework and process for informing all aspects of an arts organization's life and work, not just the aspects related to making and producing art. The artistic process is a remarkable combination of

vision, creativity, inspiration, intuition, and collaboration balanced with craft, technique, accountability, discipline, and use of time and resources. The challenging thing about the artistic process is that it is specific to each artist and therefore each arts organization, and applicable to that organization alone. It is the very definition of elegance applied to organizational behaviour – and completely confounding to those seeking institutional uniformity and practice.

According to John Holland, author of *EMERGENCE From Chaos to Order*, emergence is “much coming from little; where the whole is much more complex than the behavior of the parts.” and is the result of a complex adaptive system. An emergent system includes (1) individual players or components, (2) interacting organically and dynamically, (3) resulting in something greater than the sum of the parts. By this definition the artistic process *is* emergent, as we observe all three aspects of emergence each time a director assembles a cast, or choreographer makes a new work. As TLC Toronto participants brought qualities of their artistic processes to bear on the change initiatives they were exploring, both individually within their organizations and communally in roundtables and working groups, we could clearly see all of the components of emergent behaviour at play.

Community, Connection and Safe Space

In the arts, *community* is neither fixed nor static – it is ever changing and elastic, and ever rich in possibilities. A core value of AAR’s is our belief that all of us know more than any of us; and a community can do more than any single artist or organization working alone. That is why consortia, or bringing arts professionals together to meet, interact and exchange information as we have in the TLC Toronto, is so integral to all of our work.

While each artist may be unique in vision and working process, virtually none of the needs, issues or problems is unique. Arts organizations have a lot in common when it comes to the need for resources and the challenges they face in making work, connecting to an audience and maintaining a healthy and balanced organizational equation. This shared need for resources, while an integral connection point, does not serve as a basis for actually sharing resources. The same qualities that create community among arts professionals also serve as the basis for sharing resources of any kind. Those qualities – shared values, understanding and trust – have to be achieved through personal contact, interaction and exchange among individuals, not institutions. Competitive attitudes and positions dissipate when artists understand that their differences are artistic and not the challenges all share in making and connecting work.

Significantly, we observed in the TLC Toronto that information sharing, lateral learning and problem solving were among soft resources most immediately shared. We have observed in other experiences that the ability to first share soft resources *plus time* often equals shared hard resources (e.g. materials, equipment, space), project collaboration and sometimes community action. There is good reason to believe that the same pattern will emerge in time among the TLC Toronto participants.

The Right Tools for the Job

As with any endeavour, the success of the outcome is often determined by the effectiveness of the tools and the experience and skill of those undertaking the work. We have already established that, in terms of leading change in the sector, we believe that arts professionals have the experience and skill to succeed. What we have been experimenting with over time is how to equip them with the best tools for the job of making change.

Not surprisingly, the various planning tools we have used (e.g. Organization Profile, mapping, lateral learning communities) met with varying degrees of success with each individual organizations. What we did find was that most participants found one or more of the tools helpful in considering their organizations and the change they hoped to initiate and also that the impact of the tools was amplified in the consortium gatherings through the natural lateral learning that occurs when two or more arts professionals convene in analytic dialogue rather than single dimensional problem solving.

Based on this and other change initiative work, we continue to believe in the utility of providing a range of tools for leaders to help them in framing and undertaking change. But the unmistakable, exponential impact and benefit of employing tools in a facilitated process such as the TLC Toronto has been reaffirmed for us. In facilitated consortia, these tools clearly benefit both individual organizations and the community in amplified and accelerated ways that simply can't be replicated by an organization working alone.

The Cycle and Pattern of Change: Time as Resource

Change is not just a fact of life but also a sign of life. All human systems, including organizations, networks and sectors have life cycles in which complex intertwined, interacting components achieve optimal functioning then decline, sometimes into dysfunction. The inability to embrace

this reality can lead to old solutions becoming new problems among other organizational maladies. Situational, short-term interventions, or *fixes*, cannot address the need for systemic change and transition. Further, falling into a pattern of reactive change allows external events to control and dictate the life and direction of an organization. That coupled with a natural tendency for organizations to develop protections and retaliations against perceived threats of change can rob an organization of the ability to direct and control its own future. In fact, entire communities of organizations can reflect the same pathologies of reactive response and entropic stasis.

The TLC Toronto approach recognizes what we refer to as the *sequential cycle phenomenon* of change and transition, in which an essential resource is *time*. Even as an organization's intertwining and interacting components are working toward or achieving optimal function they are likely showing signs of stress or dysfunction. At these seemingly unlikely times, alert leadership's awareness and anticipation of the need for change will percolate. This is the beginning of a change and transition cycle sequence.

We have written elsewhere about our observations of how organizations identify and enact change (through emergence – see *Emergent Phenomena*). In the TLC Toronto, we began to observe that, as leaders within the consortium were able to start to transform themselves and their own organizations through new mindsets, tools and resources, their capacity to imagine and develop change on other levels (community, collaborative) began to emerge. Much like the repeating patterns of fractals, it appears that change manifests in similar ways at different levels. We believe that, if we can support change on the individual and organizational level, change will emerge on progressively larger scales of activity – in organizations, networks, communities, sectors and eventually in whole human systems.

There are many variables involved in the sequential cycle phenomenon, but in our experience, individual organizations free of disruptions will implement cycles of change in periods ranging from six months to two years. On the level of overall community change, the same sequential cycle phenomenon plays out but over a considerably longer period of time. On the community level, the status quo's protections and retaliation against change are more variegated and complex. Sadly at times it requires the existing status quo cycle to fall completely into dysfunction before real change can be initiated. We believe that consortia like the TLC Toronto can do much to intervene and address such community dysfunction, especially if they can be sustained over extended periods of time.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Consortia such as the TLC Toronto always provide us with special opportunities to learn, draw conclusions and make recommendations to advance our own work and share with a range of partners. The conclusions and recommendations that we make from our experience and observations are not “new” as much as re-contextualized and clarified understandings. In that spirit, we remind ourselves and encourage our partners to consider the following.

Understand & Rethink Disruption

The TLC Toronto underscored for us the fine but significant difference between transition and disruption. That is, the difference between a process of planned, deliberate change and the need for a process of intervention. While we certainly believe that intentional organizational disruption serves no productive purpose, we acknowledge that disruption naturally occurs for various reasons and at various times. While we have been reticent in the past to include organizations experiencing disruption in our consortium work, since this working format is not ideal for the intervention that disruption requires, denying participation to organizations coping with or confronting disruption artificially limits the scope of our understanding about change. In the case of the TLC Toronto participants experiencing disruption, excluding them would only have added unproductive isolation to already challenging situations. And in spite of respective challenges each of the organizations added value to the consortium.

We are aware that there is a tendency, similar to our own, to disqualify or distance organizations experiencing disruption – among funders and collaborators in particular. We encourage these others, as we have done, to rethink disruption and to engage with rather than pulling back from organizations actively navigating disruption. As long as an organization acknowledges and proactively addresses disruptive forces, we believe that they can effectively engage and use resources for positive change.

Start with the Leaders

Everything we have observed indicates that, if we want to make real, sustainable and appropriate change on the sectorial level and beyond (re-connecting the arts meaningfully with the broader scope of human endeavour) we need to start by getting resources into the hands of our promising leaders and the organizations they need to sustain and grow their work. The idea that funders,

policy makers, consultants and academics can effect sectorial change because they are able to see the bigger picture is simply wrong. The arts leaders that we have worked with are deeply invested, infinitely creative and driven to take their work to scale. They can absolutely dream big but first they must have the opportunity to create the ideas that work and build resilience for themselves and their organizations.

Let's not create new 'innovation initiatives' or chase after the 'new model'. Rather let's start making smart investments in the future by committing to the arts leaders who are best suited to innovate and create the change they need. Let's get past our silos and open the conversations we need across disciplines, budget sizes and sectorial boundaries. The arts sector is more abundant than we know – there are amazingly complex and compelling outputs at all levels. We need to unlock the great potential that is untapped and we need real, arts-led leadership to do that.

Address the Resource Distribution Problem

It became clearer and clearer as we engaged in discussions about the persistent issues, the roles and expectations in the field that there is a considerable and growing resource distribution problem in the arts sector. These are challenging discussions as everyone is inclined to be protective of what they have, even in a dysfunctional system. It has been easier, and less contentious, to focus on the challenges of being under-resourced as a sector and assumed that a solution to that challenge would automatically address the resource distribution inequities. But the traditional 'trickle down' structure in which large institutions receive the bulk of the resources with the expectation that these resources will be infused throughout the sector is out of step in a world in which exciting, dynamic and significant work is emerging in places disconnected from traditional power structures. Further, the entrenched model of resource distribution sustains historic patterns, which prevent the sector from realizing genuine equity and diversity.

It will require trust, honesty and perspective to have a truly productive conversation about change that can fundamentally shift the entrenched value systems and power structures within the sector. It will also require the trust from funders, policy makers and arts sector supporters to step back and allow the arts leaders to lead this conversation, as they must. But, knowing that change starts on an individual level and works outward, we have reason to be hopeful. Within the TLC Toronto cohorts, we observed leaders thinking differently about resource distribution and starting to implement new approaches on a small, organizational or local scale. We believe that this movement could grow and that a sector-wide change is possible as the patterns in the local are

translated on larger and larger scales and the inevitable sequential cycle of change plays out over time.

Acknowledgements

The Theatres Leading Change Toronto initiative and this Special Report was made possible through the hard work, good faith and commitment of our principal partner the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts to whom we are deeply grateful. We owe a special thanks to Jacoba Knaapen, Executive Director, and the staff and board of TAPA for the opportunity to partner with them on the development and implementation of this initiative.

We are most grateful to Sandy Houston, Michael Jones and the Metcalf Foundation for your unwavering support, funding leadership and participation in the TLC Toronto from conception to conclusion. We are also deeply grateful to Roger Gaudet and the Canada Council for the Arts, Pat Bradley, Billyann Balay and the Ontario Arts Council and Claire Hopkinson and the Toronto Arts Council for funding support of the TLC Toronto.

We are particularly indebted to the participating arts leaders who trusted us and opened themselves to our working processes and generously shared their lives, work and amazing gifts with us. We dedicate this Special Report to these arts leaders who demonstrate over and over again how to lead change.

Anne Dunning, Jane Marsland, Nello McDaniel

ARTS Action Research

ARTS Action Research works with performing, visual, literary, presenting and service arts organizations in both single and cross discipline configurations. AAR's Team of Associates address a range of needs from the most basic developmental to complex restructuring and repositioning of veteran arts organizations. Regardless of working format, AAR works with organizations on individually tailored planning processes and strategies that extend directly from each organization's artistic process. For more information about ARTS Action Research's work, services, publications and team of Associates please check our website at www.artsaction.com.

APPENDIX A: Why the TLC Toronto Initiative?

Since the completion of the Creative Trust program, which succeeded in helping mid-sized organizations to build working capital, address planning needs and develop organizational infrastructure, participating arts organizations have been looking for ways to continue to sustain and build their organizations, programs and audiences with new approaches and shared solutions. There is an eagerness not to lose the momentum that the Creative Trust generated, especially as economic conditions have flagged in the past couple of years.

Meanwhile, smaller organizations and independent producing and presenting entities have, of necessity, had to create new ways of working in order to support their work and build an audience. With little room left in the mainstream funding pools and cultural constituencies, these organizations and independents have been ‘inventing what works’ often in isolation and sometimes without being aware of similar approaches being launched by peers across town or across borders. Even as capacity building support has been delivered to the mid and larger sized arts organizations through programs such as the Creative Trust, the Metcalf Foundation’s Strategic Initiatives Program, the Trillium Foundation’s multi-year grants, the Ontario Arts Council’s Compass program and the Canada Council’s Flying Squad, this part of the sector has received little support or recognition for the kind of new ideas and approaches it has been generating with minimal resources.

While many of these initiatives have brought certain arts groups in Toronto around the same table, a true sense of community and engagement across the sector has not been fully created. Competition for resources and the lack of human resources, which leads to arts professionals who are over-extended and unlikely to engage in a meaningful way with peers, have largely meant that each organization or entity works in isolation and opportunities for collaboration or learning are not exploited. Many artists and arts professionals in the Toronto community are starting to look abroad for opportunities, frustrated by the lack of potential for artistic growth and cultural development at home.

What is perhaps most lacking in Toronto right now is an environment that encourages and supports the kind of entrepreneurial thinking and risk taking in which really creative thinkers can innovate and transform their work, their audiences and the ways in which they connect the two. It is more important than ever to make that space and protect it against the various forces that work against change.

What has become clear to arts leaders in Toronto as in the other theatre centres in which we are developing the TLC program is that the old model isn't working. It is not that we don't have the right people, the right tools, the right audiences or the right work. We believe we simply need to let the theatres lead the change that is needed and create a new reality that addresses the current environment and connects the work with the audience.

APPENDIX B: The TLC Toronto Cohorts – Cygnus & Andromeda

ANDROMEDA GROUP

Acting Up Stage Company

Mitchell Marcus, Producer
Paul Beauchamp, Assistant General Manager

Dancemakers

Michael Trent, Artistic Director
Robert Sauvey, Executive Director

Factory Theatre

Nina Lee Aquino & Nigel Shawn Williams, Co-Artistic Directors
Sarah Meurling, General Manager

The Theatre Centre

Franco Boni, General & Artistic Director
Roxanne Duncan, Managing Director

Théâtre français de Toronto

Guy Mignault, Artistic Director
Ghislain Caron, Managing Director

Theatre Passe Muraille

Andy McKim, Artistic Director
Kendra Fry, General Manager (outgoing)
Régine Cadet, General Manager

Toronto Dance Theatre

Christopher House, Artistic Director
Andrea Vagianos, Managing Director

Volcano Theatre

Ross Manson, Artistic Director
Meredith Potter, General Manager

CYGNUS GROUP

Alameda Theatre Company

Marilo Nunez, Artistic Director
Sigrid Velis, General Manager

Cahoots Theatre

Marjorie Chan, Artistic Director
Kate Ann Vandermeer, General Manager
Nina Lee Aquino, Artistic Director (outgoing)
Sandra Lefrancois (outgoing)

Convergence Theatre

Julie Tepperman, Artistic Director
Aaron Willis, General Manager

Ipsita Nova Dance Projects/Nova Dance

Nova Bhattacharya, Artistic Director
Meredith Potter, General Manager

Nightswimming

Brian Quirt, Artistic Director
Rupal Shah, Producer

Praxis Theatre

Michael Wheeler, Artistic Director
Aislinn Rose, General Manager

Theatre Columbus

Jennifer Brewin, Artistic Director
Dan Daly, General Manager (outgoing)

Theatre Smash

Ashlie Corcoran, Artistic Director
Stacey Norton, General Manager

UnSpun Theatre

Chris Hanratty, Artistic Director
Shira Leuchter, General Manager

WhyNot Theatre

Ravi Jain, Artistic Director
Owais Lightwala, Artistic Producer