

# **Facilitating Leadership through Action Learning: The case of the Creative & Cultural Industries**

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## **SUMMARY**

This is an account of a novel approach to leadership development in the UK's Creative & Cultural Industries. The *Leadership Facilitation Skills* programme [LFS] helps people to develop their skills in leadership through the unusual route of learning to facilitate action learning sets. The LFS is based on a *Facilitative Leadership* model that is proposed as well suited to organisations operating in complex environments and subject to unpredictable change. *Facilitative Leadership* "teaches you to facilitate your peers as they tackle complex organisational challenges" and involves learning a particular skills set comprising: *attending, listening, questioning, reflecting, learning and giving fewer solutions*.

This original approach to leadership development combines facilitation with action learning in resolving participants' leadership challenges in order to develop their personal leadership practices. Previously, many of these Creative & Cultural Industries managers did not know what leadership was, or had not seen it as applying to them. The LFS and the *Facilitative Leadership* model allowed these people to recognise and acknowledge themselves as leaders for the first time.

This paper starts with an introduction, a background briefing on the UK's Creative & Cultural Industries and a survey of how leadership is understood in this sector. The main part of the paper is a case study based on evaluations of the programme undertaken between 2008 and 2010. The findings from the case are then put into the context of wider ideas about leadership and leadership development. The paper concludes that the LFS is an important innovation in leadership development, especially in the context of the complexities and diversities of the creative economy. It is proposed as applicable to any situation where managers and leaders hold innovative and generative aspirations whilst facing difficult challenges and turbulent conditions.

## **Introduction**

This paper describes an innovative approach to leadership development in the UK's Creative & Cultural Industries. Participants on a programme of *Leadership Facilitation Skills* [LFS] run by Action Learning Associates (ALA), developed their skills in leadership by learning to facilitate action learning sets. As part of a wider *Cultural Leadership Programme* [CLP] for the Creative & Cultural Industries, the LFS is based on the proposition that:

*Learning to facilitate action learning increases a person's effectiveness as a facilitative leader*

This account is based on data taken from evaluation studies carried out by the author and Kath Aspinwall on three cohorts of cultural leaders who completed the LFS between April 2008 and May 2010. A case study of learning from the LFS is prefaced by a briefing on the Creative & Cultural Industries in the UK and a survey of how leadership is understood in this sector.

The findings from the case are then examined in the context of wider ideas about leadership and leadership development, especially including the action learning approach. The paper concludes that the LFS is an important innovation in leadership development, especially in the context of the complexities and diversities of the creative economy.

## **The Creative & Cultural Industries**

This sector, or sectors, since it is made up of many skills, crafts and professions, makes up about 5% of UK GDP. The sector is diverse with few large organisations and many small ones including charities and social enterprises, together with many self-employed people. Also referred to as the creative economy, these are *“industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property.”* (DCMS 2001: 4) In 2001, the sector contributed over a million jobs and more than 100bn. to the UK economy (DCMS 2001). Over the last decade it is believed to have grown at twice the rate of the economy as a whole, and its potential is thought to be yet greater.

Although definitions vary, the sector is generally held to include advertising, architecture, arts & antiques markets, crafts, design, fashion, film & photography, software & computer games, music, the visual and performing arts, publishing, TV & radio. Of these, design, publishing, radio & TV comprise about 50% of the employment and 75% of the revenues. The enterprises of the creative economy, concerned as they are with encouraging, developing and exploiting the ideas and creative talents of the nation, are seen as central to new wealth creation and to finding new global markets for the UK. The diversity and flexibility of organisations in the sector is seen to advantage in a capacity to organise and network local enterprises with regional and national initiatives, as in for example the promotion of urban regeneration through cultural heritage and tourism activities.

### ***Leadership in the Creative & Cultural Industries sector***

The importance of leadership to the Creative & Cultural Industries was recognised in 2006 by the establishment of the CLP as a partnership of Arts Council England, the Creative & Cultural Sector Skills Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. With initial funding of £12 million from government, the CLP offers a number of leadership development activities with a primary focus on the core cultural sector of Crafts; Libraries & Archives; Museums & Galleries; Music and Performing, Literary & Visual Arts. The CLP also seeks to benefit the wider creative and cultural sector in areas such as advertising, design, the historic environment.

To determine what might be most helpful in terms of leadership development in any given context, it is important to know first how leadership is understood. As ALA tutor, Di Bligh puts it, the Creative & Cultural Industries are *“formed largely of ‘modern’ organisations, where the nature of the product is often not known until the last moment, where the workforce is enormously diverse, whether defined by profession, passion, skill, experience....and much production is high risk, riven with ambiguity, and often only possible in co-production with a range of disparate partners. In other words, the opposite of a widget factory, and therefore likely to require leaders who ask as much as they tell, inspire, can manage multiple possibilities, and will be most effective if they can offer and receive respect based trust”* (Personal communication 9.1.11) .

The views of some prominent people published on the CLP website ([www.culturalleadership.org.uk/](http://www.culturalleadership.org.uk/)) give some glimpses of how leadership is seen in the Creative & Cultural Industries. These quotes acknowledge the diversity of the sector and recognise that cultural and creative leaders come in all shapes and sizes, being as different in style and background as the organisations they serve. This diversity is also seen in the opinions of what constitutes good leadership and the good leader. Whilst some people see leadership as the province of rare and outstanding individuals, others depict it as more of an art or skill that can be learned. Here are some examples of these contrasting views taken from the CLP website:

*(i) The “heroic” view: Leaders as outstanding individuals*

“Effective cultural leaders are able to articulate a clear and inclusive vision, exercise influence and marshal resources to make change happen, and challenge people to achieve more than they believed possible.”

“...they display clarity of vision coupled with a steely determination to deliver. They resist the temptation to get caught up in detail. Instead, they are able to identify – and then concentrate on – the few issues that really matter to any organisation at any given time.”

“To be a great cultural leader, the range of skills needed to come together in one human being is immense: entrepreneurial, logistical, visionary, curatorial, political and strategic.”

*(ii) The “art” or skill view: Leadership is something that can be learned*

“It is important that we do not crush individuality. There is no identikit leader, no prescription for what leaders should look like..”

“...leaders must be open, and developing relationships and networks is vital. I believe that leadership is an artform not a science; instincts are important and they make things happen. Leadership’s an art that needs a good dose of humility, a focus on people and team building and an openness to learning.”

“Emerging leaders need time to develop and support for their weaker skills, alongside a range of different options. These might include research time, secondments, mentoring (in both directions), shadowing, networks and skill shares. Our leaders need to be representative whilst remaining individual – it would be awful if we homogenised leaders.”

A final quote points up the importance of this debate:

“It is important to recognise that the idea of a ‘great leader’ may not be helping us. We are often looking to our leaders to solve our problems and we find them lacking. The idea that an individual may come along who could save us and solve our problems maybe allows us to not recognise our own leadership skills”.

This raises important questions: does the “heroic” cultural leader produce dependency amongst other people? Does the view that leaders need an “immense range of skills” and a “steely determination”, put off people who do not see themselves as having all these qualities from taking part in leadership?

Where the heroic view holds away, does this work against the development of a bigger and more diverse pool of leadership in the sector?

As a programme for leadership development, the LFS aligns more with the view that leadership can be learned by many people, and not just the few. As illustrated in the Case below, the LFS champions the particular idea of *Facilitative Leadership* as a blend of facilitation, action and learning.

### **CASE STUDY: The Leadership Facilitation Skills programme (LFS)**

*Acknowledgement: Kath Aspinwall was co-researcher and co-author of the evaluations and interviews on which this case is based.*

Since April 2008, more than 130 cultural industries leaders and managers have participated in four cohorts of the LFS run by ALA for the CLP. The LFS originates in feedback from earlier CLP initiatives which indicated that network meetings and action learning were seen as particularly valuable. The brief was to design and deliver a programme in “facilitation skills, particularly in regard to action learning, for leaders across the sectors” of the creative & cultural industries (CLP 2008). Chosen partly because of their knowledge of the sector and of the context in which leadership happens, ALA developed the LFS with the guiding philosophy of *Facilitative Leadership*, and the central proposition that *learning to facilitate action learning increases a person’s effectiveness as a facilitative leader*.

#### ***Facilitative Leadership***

Katie Venner ALA Tutor

*Contemporary writers on leadership tend to agree that the old models of leadership as command and control, based on scientific notions of organisation as machine or production line do not serve us well, faced with the complexity and constant change in our organisations today. These old models are surprisingly deeply ingrained in most of us, and we see them mirrored in the hierarchical organisations that many of us in the cultural sector work in. Writers like Margaret Wheatley (Leadership and the New Science) and Peter Senge (The Fifth Discipline) propose a new model of leadership based on facilitation and learning. Drawing on the new science of quantum physics, Wheatley considers that focusing on the quality of relationships, reflecting on information that disconfirms our past beliefs and practices, and maintaining an inquiring mind are all attributes of the new leaders we need in our organisations.*

*In action learning sets we learn a different way of relating to that which has become common in organisations; we slow down and listen to each other without interruption; we pause to reflect on recent experiences that challenge us; we examine our underlying beliefs and assumptions about our role as leaders; we celebrate our unique qualities as human beings. This we do in a supportive environment, where there is appropriate challenge to keep us working at our learning edge. Learning how to become a set member and to facilitate a set, gives us the opportunity to practice the skills of active non-judgmental listening and asking open questions that facilitate others to learn and change.*

*The action learning facilitator training offers you the chance to reflect on your leadership journey with peers from the sector who understand the particular challenges you face. It teaches you to facilitate your peers as they tackle complex organisational challenges. These skills are directly*

*transferable to your board, team, freelance enterprise, collaborative partnership and organisation, whatever your leadership role (ALA 2009).*

The three aims of the LFS are to help participants develop:

- skills in action learning and its facilitation
- general facilitation skills
- their practice of leadership

The programme starts with a three day meeting, followed by several weeks back in the workplace and a concluding two days. Participants work in groups of about eight to learn how to facilitate action learning with reference to their own leadership issues. ALA provides a workbook (ALA 2009) with additional guided reading on leadership, facilitation and action learning. Participants keep learning logs which can be submitted as part of accreditation for a Professional Development Award in Action Learning Facilitation from the Institute of Learning and Management (ILM).

Evaluations conducted on the first three cohorts of the LFS (Pedler & Aspinwall 2009a; 2009b & 2010), report high levels of learning and satisfaction. The second report concluded that the LFS was “successful and well-managed ... with no obvious areas for improvement”. Consequently, the third evaluation sought to tackle the more difficult task of assessing impact at the job behaviour and organisation change levels. So what was learned from these reports about leadership development in the Creative & Cultural Industries?

#### ***“Influential Professional Development” (Learning from Cohort 1 - April 2008 – April 2009)***

The combination of the three LFS aims led to some initial confusion and different expectations amongst participants; some came specifically for action learning facilitation skills, others for leadership development. Interviews with CLP staff responsible for drawing up the tender document suggest that some ambiguity was partly intentional, with the aim of encouraging a creative response from ALA.

At a final one day event held for all Cohort 1 participants, 26 people felt the focus on action learning had been about right, and 6 that it had been too much; on general facilitation skills, 21 said “about right”, 10 “too little”, and 1 “too much”. On leadership however, whilst 12 thought that it had been about right, 18 respondents felt this had had too little emphasis. Some people would have liked more opportunities to work with leadership issues in the action learning process and also to have had more input on leadership and different models against which to compare and contrast traditional styles. Despite this, participants generally expressed a very high level of satisfaction, some describing their learning as profound, both personally and professionally:

*“It was a very influential piece of professional development. It challenged ideas of leadership, management and hierarchy. It gave me food for thought that I continue to consider and techniques that are transferable across all of my life”.*

### ***“Facilitative Leadership” (Learning from Cohort 2 - June 2009 to January 2010)***

In Cohort 2, ALA set out to make the leadership element more explicit and to improve the integration of the three aims. This was done in several ways: in the recruitment process, in new pre-programme reading materials, in the modified programme Workbook (ALA 2009) and on the course itself, which now included a discussion session and exercises on leadership. The second evaluation report found much less tension between the aims and that all participants “completely” or “mostly” achieved their personal goals. It concluded that *“the programme design and delivery now leaves little room for further improvement. There has been no drop out in this cohort”* (Pedler & Aspinwall 2009a: 3).

The rebalancing of the aims, and the increased emphasis on leadership, brought the *Facilitative Leadership* model to the fore. This was evident in the more explicit presentation of the model by ALA tutors, and also in participants’ accounts as they articulated their own personal learning about leadership. By learning to facilitate action learning, participants said that they had increased their skills in attending, listening, questioning, reflecting, learning and giving fewer solutions (Pedler & Aspinwall 2009a: 4).

Cohort 2 participants reported that practising these skills has helped them become more effective in their roles and relationships with colleagues. Some thought this approach particularly suited to the sector:

*“In terms of my leadership learning, it feels important that we, as a sector, model the generosity of open questioning and action learning. I have a lot of advice and guidance experience and it has been interesting to unlearn the compulsion to offer solutions. There is less ego invested in action learning.”*

A third evaluation (Pedler & Aspinwall 2010) had the dual purpose of monitoring the immediate outcomes learning from Cohort 3, and testing for the longer-term efficacy of the LFS through a follow-up of Cohorts 1 & 2 to look for evidence of learning at the job behaviour and organisation change levels (Kirkpatrick 1983; 1996). These two purposes are now discussed separately.

### ***“The Imposter Syndrome” (Learning from Cohort 3 - January to May 2010)***

When Cohort 3 participants were asked to comment on what they had learned about leadership in the sector, this triggered a high level of often strongly expressed responses. The two most frequently expressed views concerned the diversity of leaders and of leadership styles in the creative & cultural industries. Whilst participants acknowledged an existing and appropriate variety of leadership (“no one size fits all”), they also pointed to a need for more diversity especially in senior positions. Many felt that there was a predominance of hierarchical and “heroic” views and styles in these positions, and that this was not what most people wanted. They thought that there was a mismatch between what they perceived as desirable leadership qualities, such as being open, listening, facilitative and collaborative, with what they saw as the dominant in terms of leadership styles and skills of the sector.

This perception is probably linked to gender. As in earlier cohorts, Cohort 3 was mainly female and mid-career, some working freelance or running small organisations, others in middle management positions in larger organisations. They often noted that senior positions in the sector are more likely to be held by

men, and that the heroic view of leadership is predominantly a male one. This has various consequences, one being the view that:

*"women in the cultural sector suffer from Imposter Syndrome"*

*Imposter Syndrome* (Clance & Imes 1978) refers to the condition where people find it hard to believe that they deserve any credit for what they may achieve, and remain internally convinced that they are frauds whatever their outward appearances. Later research suggests that this is a widespread phenomenon likely to affect men as well as women, and especially those in positions of responsibility. The *Imposter Syndrome* was one amongst many themes that emerged from action learning presentations on the LFS. The tutors encouraged participants to focus on such issues as part of working towards the type of leadership they wanted to accomplish, and the action learning environment appears to have created the trusting but testing opportunity for them to begin tackling such challenges.

### ***"Longer term gains in Facilitative Leadership" (Learning from Follow-up study of Cohorts 1 & 2)***

To evaluate the longer term impact of the LFS, participants from Cohorts 1 & 2 were sent a follow-up questionnaire and a request for the e-mail addresses of three people – bosses, colleagues, clients or business partners – who could comment on their work performance and on any observable effects of the programme.

*Participants' Responses* After three reminders, 32 questionnaires were obtained from the 65 participants who could be contacted (out of a possible 75). These reported an average increase of 1.25 on a five point scale in their before and after skill levels in facilitating, listening, questioning and reflecting – four of the skills making up the notion of the *Facilitative Leader*. For all respondents the combined average score for these skill areas was 3.0 before the LFS and 4.25 afterwards.

*Colleagues' Responses* The attempt to engage colleagues had a very limited response: only 9 participants offered addresses, from which we received only 8 colleagues' responses in total. Those colleagues who did respond confirmed the participants' own reported skill gains, and scored them higher; before and after programme scores for their participants averaging 3.9 and 4.9.

Given the low levels of response these findings are tentative at best, but do indicate, at a point up to one year after the end of their programmes, that significant numbers of LFS participants have advanced their abilities as facilitative leaders.

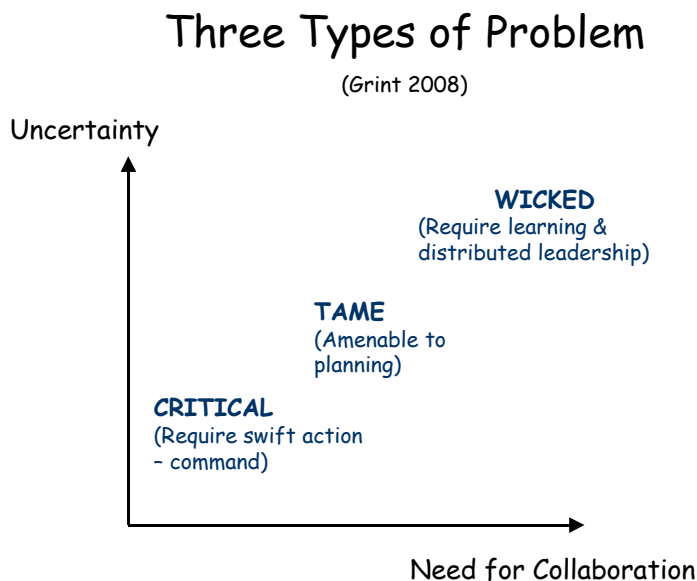
### **Discussion: Facilitating Leadership via Action learning**

The LFS is an important innovation in leadership development; first in promoting a particular model of *Facilitative Leadership*, and secondly, in the discovery that this can be developed via the learning of action learning facilitation skills. Although *Facilitative Leadership* is a local construction, developed specifically for the Creative & Cultural Industries, it has a wider significance for any sector of the economy where managers and leaders are working with diverse workforces to respond creatively to difficult challenges.

## What sort of Leadership?

Whilst leadership is much discussed and almost universally held to be important, it remains a contested topic, with no single accepted definition or agreed set of qualities (Grint 2004: 1). In Grint's model (Figure 1), the leadership required varies with the type of problem or challenge to be faced. The progression from *critical* to *tame* to *wicked* problems is marked by both an increase in uncertainty and a greater need for collaboration to resolve the challenge in question. Crisis situations, such as train crashes or heart attacks, require swift action and *command*. Tame problems may be very complex, as in timetabling a school or building a new hospital, but are essentially amenable to rational planning or *management*. The wicked problems are ambiguous and slippery; the challenges of loss of public funding, of developing new audiences, or of engaging disparate parties in a joint task, do not yield to rational analysis and require *leadership* (2008: 11-18).

Figure 1: Three Types of Problem



This typology stands in for a much more complex range of contexts and challenges in leadership, and illustrates the dictum that if you only have one leader, you are short on leadership. “Naturals’ in crisis situations may well be badly suited to the complexities and ambiguities of the other types. Positional leaders may be risk-averse and focus their energies on the tame problems, avoiding the wicked and more strategic ones. The wicked issues involve dealing with ambiguity, reconciling conflicting aims and generating a concerted effort by many people working together. Leadership here is less about command or planning, and more about questioning, listening, not rushing to solutions, experimenting and learning.

### *Positional & Distributed leadership*

The heroic image of the leader is strongly entrenched; for many people it is what “leadership” means. At the same time we can easily acknowledge that no one leader is ideal for all situations, which opens the door to the idea of distributed leadership, where many people are engaged in the practice.



Variously known as “informal” or “dispersed” (Bolden 2004:13), “shared” (Peace & Conger 2003) and “collaborative” (Jameson in Collinson & Collinson 2009), distributed leadership contrasts with focused or “concentrated” (Ross et al 2005: 131); “leader-centric” (Gronn 2002: 423-5) and “heroic” leadership (Collinson & Collinson 2009: 367).

Positional leadership is a concentrated form associated with hierarchical authority. But being no more suited to all tasks and situations than anyone else, positional leaders have long co-existed with distributed leaders especially in organisations employing professionals on “knowledge work”. This dualistic aspect of leadership calls for a subtle balancing of direction and delegation; a feat made more difficult by any “heroic” assumptions in the situation. Notions of headship and the heroic leader may be very different, but are sometimes easily confused, as when a head expects themselves, or is expected by others, to act heroically.

### *Facilitative Leadership*

*Facilitative Leadership*, as proposed on the LFS programme, can be practiced by either positional or distributed leaders, and offers a new model for conditions of ambiguity, diversity, complexity and the quest for innovation. Influenced by social constructionist notions which focus on what people are doing rather than who or what they are, and is “about leading rather than leaders or leadership”, looks well suited to a sector with a project culture and a high percentage of freelancers and small businesses (Venner 2011). Action learning is proposed as the learning milieu for this new leadership, because it “teaches you to facilitate your peers as they tackle complex organisational challenges”.

On the basis of LFS participants’ own reports, *Facilitative Leadership* involves:

- attending - *focusing attention*
- listening - *listening to and understanding what others have to say rather than imposing own views*
- questioning - *asking good and critical questions which surface underlying issues and lead to creative outcomes*
- reflecting- *ability to think through and make sense both before and after taking action*
- learning – *learning new skills, learning from group situations and generally from reflecting on experience*
- giving fewer solutions- *“unlearning the compulsion to offer solutions”*

(Pedler & Aspinwall 2009a: 4)

In their reports many participants note a cultural leaning towards the heroic style of leadership. Most felt that the sector would benefit from more facilitative leaders and from a generally more facilitative style. In this context, the *Facilitative Leadership* model offers all leaders an addition to their existing repertoires, and an increased choice and flexibility in styles.

### ***What sort of Leadership Development?***

Given that the type of leadership required can vary, and that it can be both highly concentrated and widely distributed, where should the resources for leadership development be focused?

Figure 2 shows four options for leadership development strategy based on whether the focus is upon developing *the FEW* or *the MANY*, and on whether the purpose is the creation of *human capital* (individuals) or *social capital* (connections, relationships and culture):

Figure 2: Where is the leadership development that matters?  
(Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell 2010:287)

		<b>PURPOSE:</b>	
		Individual Leadership: (Human Capital)	Collective Leadership: (Social Capital)
<b>FOCUS:</b>			
Leadership by the FEW	<b>HEROIC LEADERSHIP</b>		<b>TOP TEAMS:</b> Leadership by top & strategic teams
Leadership by the MANY	<b>LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS:</b> Leadership as distributed and delegated to people in the hierarchy	<b>SHARED LEADERSHIP:</b> Everyone a leader: leadership as widely diffused and distributed, as in a shared culture, and in the organisational DNA	

According to Burgoyne (2005), most organisations spend about 80% of their leadership development budget on their top leaders (top-left quadrant in Fig. 3 above), and on their high potential “leadership pipeline”(Charan 2001). Alternatively, the top-right option puts the emphasis on teams, particularly at the top or in strategic positions. A third strategy (bottom-left) is for positional leadership “at all levels”, as often invoked in the NHS and which involves all those, such as lead professionals or team leaders, in designated roles of authority. The fourth option (bottom-right) aims at an organisational style and ethos of widely distributed leadership, where everyone can contribute and be a leader.

***Blended Leadership Development?***

Any organisation may need a mix of these options:

“ ... Branson is clearly a heroic leader, but he is also something else: a symbol and icon of the Virgin cultural brand. So top left and bottom right work together. Branson also has a small

stable top team with people who have been with him from the early days and who spend a lot of time together at his West Indies retreat (top right). They are also probably quite good at empowering local, operational leaders in the broad ranging Virgin empire, that is, the bottom left position.” (Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell 2010: 288/9)

Leadership development strategies may need to reflect the plurality of complex and diverse contexts like those of the Creative & Cultural Industries. The term “blended leadership” is proposed to describe a paradoxical but consistent finding from a study of employee views of effective leadership in Further Education (Collinson & Collinson 2009). Whilst FE staff prefer “open, engaged and collaborative” leadership, they also value “clear and decisive” direction. The authors conclude that this suggests “an inter-relatedness of leadership behaviours often assumed to be incompatible”(2009: 369).

The blended leadership hypothesis is a “both ... and”, rather than an “either ... or” position. Even if the need for senior “heroic” leaders is held to be of first importance, this does not seem to rule out the need for more facilitative leaders, and perhaps there could be benefit from having more of both types. However, this prompts the question of whether the heroic and facilitative styles of leadership can cohabit or complement each other in the same enterprise? Or does the continuing influence of the heroic model mean that, alongside some outstanding leaders, there is an inhibition of distributed leaders, and a lack of encouragement for more facilitative styles? Some cultural organisations attempt to deal with this dilemma in a division of functions, as for example in the artistic director and general manager of a theatre company.

### ***An action learning perspective***

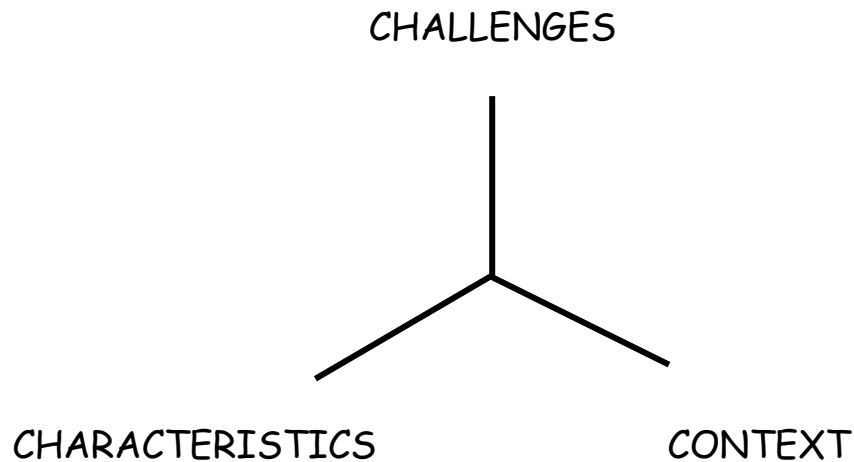
The *Facilitative Leadership* model embodies the action learning ethos and method in which it is realized. Learning to be more facilitative involves learning new skills, but the acquisition of these skills cannot be separated from:

*“the humanistic ethos of action learning (which) contributes to participants’ sense of themselves as resourceful individuals relating to each other as equals irrespective of differences in position and values” (Venner 2011).*

Action learning is increasingly popular in leadership development programmes, especially in large organisations. Such programmes are reported as increasingly using “context specific” approaches, including work based learning, active learning, problem-based learning and action learning (Mabey & Thomson 2000; Horne & Steadman Jones 2001; Bolden 2005: 11). In the USA, one estimate is that 73% of corporations now use action learning for leadership development (Marquardt 2010).

An action learning perspective on leadership sees it as an activity, as something done or performed, with an emphasis on local action to generate socially useful outcomes. In this view, leadership or *leading* can be thought of as comprising three domains:

Figure 3: Three Domains of Leadership  
(Pedler, Burgoyne & Boydell 2010:5)



*Challenges* are the critical tasks and issues requiring action; *context* refers to the situation or on-site conditions in which leadership happens; and *characteristics* are the qualities, and abilities of anyone in the situation who can make a contribution to what is needed. *Challenges* come first because how critical tasks are addressed in action is what most defines leadership.

*Context* is neglected in many leadership programmes, yet all leading is situated and happens in specific locations. The greater the variety and complexity of contexts the less likely it is that any one approach will fit all situations.

The *Characteristics* domain features prominently in many leadership programmes partly because of the heroic legacy, but also because it lends itself to teaching and training approaches. In the action learning approach this domain comes last, not because personal qualities are unimportant in leadership, but because the particular qualities that might make a vital difference can rarely be pre-specified. Challenging situations can bring forth surprising talents from unexpected quarters, and nominating lists of *Characteristics* in advance can limit the potential “gene pool” of contributors. An action learning approach aims to give access to anyone who can make a useful contribution to the situation.

LFS respondents repeatedly refer to the importance of encouraging people at all levels to realise their ideas and creativity and to come up with their own solutions to their practice issues. The “humanistic ethos of action learning” seems especially suited to this task because it supports the honest and open exploration of leadership challenges in the context of personal practices. Failures to lead, or preferences for safety over risk, are common enough in organisations. Action learning provides a structure and a philosophy for addressing both these inner and the outer challenges of leadership.

## Conclusion

The large majority of the participants in these studies thought that learning to facilitate action learning had helped them to become more effective leaders. The LFS case provides strong support for the thesis that *learning to facilitate action learning increases a person's effectiveness as a facilitative leader* and demonstrates the validity of the *Facilitative Leadership* model for the Creative & Cultural Industries and for other sectors where similar conditions are encountered.

Of these findings some limitations must be admitted. The size and diversity of the sector renders provisional any generalisations from small samples, especially those that are self-selecting in choosing to attend the LFS and then to respond to the evaluations. The LFS attracts more women more than men, and more freelance, mid-career and middle managers rather than the "big personalities" who may sustain the heroic style. There are also a small minority of participants who felt they had learned much about action learning facilitation, but who still wanted more on leadership; suggesting that, for them at least, these skills sets are not synonymous. Finally there is the question of the example of the ALA tutors, who led from the front in espousing and enacting *Facilitative Leadership*, and who were experienced as highly skilled and authentic. Would less skilful leaders have established the thesis so strongly? Or would another programme based on a different model, but led convincingly, be equally successful with participants looking for help with their leadership?

Whilst these questions remain, the evidence available here strongly supports the *Facilitative Leadership* hypothesis as especially relevant to the Creative and Cultural Industries and also to other sectors of the economy with innovative and generative aspirations. In combining action learning with facilitation in the resolution of participants' leadership challenges and in the development of their personal leadership practices, the LFS emerges as a strikingly original approach to leadership development. In many organisations perhaps, facilitative approaches may be inhibited by more dominant conceptions of leadership held at senior levels. In this case, many of the LFS participants had previously thought of themselves as managers or freelancers, and had either not known what leadership was, or had seen it as not applying to them. The LFS and the *Facilitative Leadership* model allowed these people to recognise and acknowledge themselves as leaders for the first time.

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