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Festival Leadership, Structures and Roles

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After reading this chapter you should:

- Be aware of the difference between leadership and management
- Understand different leadership types and characteristics
- Understand management structures and roles within festivals production
- Be familiar with the concepts of cultural and social goods
- Be able to categorise your festival's social, cultural and economic purposes
- Appreciate the role of leadership and its unique challenges in festival production
- Understand the relationship between values, vision and organisational structure.

Introduction

Running or working for a festival, you will find that you have to deal with issues related to structure and staff roles almost on a daily basis. These management issues will sit alongside leadership questions about your festival's purpose, values, governance and ethos. In this chapter, you will be introduced to leadership models and different management structures and roles within festival production. The chapter will emphasise the role of leadership in the cultural sector, including artistic and creative vision. It will introduce the concept of organisational culture and discuss the relationship between structure, culture and values. It will also discuss and illustrate the key roles in festival management and delivery.

So, what does the term 'leadership' mean and how does it differ from the term 'manager' which is also often used to describe people in authority? Titles have over the years changed, so what were once 'managing directors' at the top of companies are now 'chief executives. So, are leaders and managers or directors and chief executives the same role but by a different name? The answer is that it very much depends on the individual and the organisation. But in general terms leaders and managers are now thought of in different terms, both in terms of skills and roles.

Leadership and management

Modern management skills emerged in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the foundation and rapid expansion of factories in order to utilise the first generation of technological development for profit and public benefit. This is commonly known as the Industrial Revolution. Both management theory and theories of leadership emanate from this time, although they weren't fully formulated until industrial manufacturing was refined in the twentieth century. At that point management theory became a discipline through studies by people like FW Taylor, Abraham Maslow, Peter Senge, Peter Drucker and John Adair. These and others turned management studies into an academic discipline.

Historically, managers have often been thought of as people who sit in offices and spend their time in meetings. American management scientist Tom Peters (2015), showed a very different style of management and coined the phrase 'managing by walking about'. In this the managers engaged in all aspects of a company's operation by getting out onto the factory floor and talking to the staff. On the one hand, this is less relevant to a small festival than a large industrial concern, but it is nevertheless a very good principle to remember. If you are working for a festival in a junior role, how often do you see the festival director(s)? They may not need to know the detail of what you do, but an occasional bit of recognition can be very good for staff morale.

Management of and leadership in the arts and culture, including festivals, has taken a more functional approach, often built around one of artistic vision, marketing or finance, and the focal point has shifted over the years, often from the creative to the financial, and structures and team roles have changed accordingly. For example, the development of the music industry in the 1960s and 1970s was led by a number of music-loving 'mavericks' who set up their own record labels to record the artists they loved and challenge an industry long-dominated by companies like EMI and Decca. People like Gerry Bron (Bronze), Chris Wright (Chrysalis), Tony Stratton-Smith (Charisma), Richard Branson (Virgin Records) and most notably Chris Blackwell (Island Records) had no formal management training but had a passion for music. These were music industry leaders of their time, finding bands, signing, developing and releasing them. Chris Blackwell at Island signed and developed the careers of first Bob Marley and then U2 amongst others. Behind these music leaders were a series of label managers who engaged in the detail, trying to keep pace with their bosses' artistic ideas and turn their visions into production schedules and product releases.

In the arts, people like Thelma Holt and Peter Hall played a similar leadership role in theatre and Dame Marie Rambert in dance. Sir Nicholas Serota, now Chair of Arts Council England, spent over forty years, first at

the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, then at London's Whitechapel Gallery and finally at The Tate Gallery championing and growing the interest in and opportunities for the visual arts, and has clearly been a leader in that sector.

In terms of music festivals, everyone talks about Michael Eavis, founder of *Glastonbury* as a leader in the field. But in the late 1990s and early 2000s *Glastonbury* ran into serious security and health and safety issues and came close to being closed down. So, in 2002 Eavis brought in the highly experienced festival producer Melvyn Benn, who became *Glastonbury's* licensee and remained so for 10 years. Benn's companies, the Mean Fiddler group and then Festival Republic, also developed *Latitude* and *Benicassim* in Spain as well as running London's '*Fleadh*' and gaining outdoor dance licenses for *Tribal Gathering*, *Creamfields* and *Homelands*. He has also run the *Reading* and *Leeds Festivals* since 1989 and a number of others. It is the less prominent Benn who has been a clear leader in developing music festivals in Britain. Others less prominent but equally influential in this field include Jo Vidler, who co-founded the first of the 'boutique festivals', *Secret Garden Party*, before leaving to set up *Wilderness* and running festivals in Mexico and Thailand.

Just being a good manager is not enough. The above examples are of people who all had or developed management competencies. But more importantly they all had creative visions which helped change artistic outcomes in their fields. The way they did this and the relationship between leadership and management varied according to their sector. But overall the distinction between leadership and management can be reduced to a short, but generally true aphorism neatly put by the management theorist Peter Drucker, "management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things" (Drucker, 2000).

Leadership entails creating a vision from an analysis of what the future could look like, but based on a set of values rather than rules. That is the starting point. Management is the discipline of producing practical systems and processes from that vision and creating outcomes that work in financial and product terms. Management is about efficiency and organisation to produce products, services or experiences the public want, can afford and enjoy. Leadership, particularly the kind of entrepreneurial leadership involved in setting up a new festival, is about seeing opportunities others haven't and persuading people it's a good idea.