Organizational Culture Shifts Associated with Distributed Leadership in the Arts

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Within existing arts organizations that have historically been hierarchical, white curators and directors can reposition themselves by moving the organization to a model of shared leadership wherein they enable the "conditions for distributed leadership to thrive."[1] Distributed leadership models are dynamic, emergent, and unique to each organization.[2] In models of distributed leadership, directors and curators must demonstrate what is called "flexible adjustment": leading from the front when required and stepping back when required to allow those with historically less authority the opportunity to lead.[3] During the writing of this book, Hope Mohr Dance transitioned to a model of distributed leadership in which we changed from a white founder-led hierarchy to a multiracial, multiethnic co-directorship that I now share with two other staff: Karla Quintero and Cherie Hill, both female artists of color. For me, distributing leadership was the only way the organization could align our internal structures with the values that drive our public programs.

When it is value-driven, distributed leadership must be more than moving items from the founder or director's "to do" list onto someone else's. It must be more than cosmetic or perfunctory title changes. Beyond structural changes, distributed leadership, if it is to be meaningful, must be a shift in organizational culture—a change in how work actually gets done. As Cyndi Suarez writes:

> Oftentimes leaders or social-change activists think that, if they create and implement new structures, they can shift the way people in an organization interact. Focusing instead on creating collective understanding of how people are currently interacting and their desired ways of interacting can lead to exponential and immediate change.[4]

Below are some of the ways in which an organization's internal culture must shift in order for distributed leadership to be meaningful.

- Certainty → Uncertainty
- Culture of efficiency → Culture of democracy
- Action-oriented → Process-oriented
- Founder/Director time → Multiple approaches to time welcome
- Cult(ure) of personality → Culture of community
- Culture of control → Culture of trust
- Fixed roles → Fluid roles
- Diversity mindset → Equity mindset
- "People of color are who we serve" → "How can we give power to people of color?"
- Regranting/Gatekeeping resources → Facilitating direct artist access to resources

[1] Hope Mohr and Michèle Steinwald, "Building Accountability in the Dance Field: An Interview with Michèle Steinwald," *the body is the brain* (HMD blog), October 5, 2018, https://www.hopemohr.org/blog/2018/9/30/building-accountability-in-the-dance-field-an-interview-with-michele-steinwald.

[2] Michael Allison, Susan Misra and Elissa Perry, "Doing More with More," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, June 25, 2018, https://nonprofitquarterly.org/doing-more-with-more-putting-shared-leadership-into-practice/ Nonprofit Quarterly.

[3] Open Mind Consulting, "Case Studies in Distributed Leadership: A Framework for Exploration, Organizational Snapshots, and Tools and Applications", (Prepared for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation), November 2018, 13.

[4] Cyndi Suarez, *The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics* (New Society, 2018), 12.

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