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Author/s:

Caust, J

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Different Cultures but Similar Roles: Leadership of Major Performing Arts Centres

Jo Caust

Introduction

Large purpose-built performing arts centres have been a widespread phenomenon in Western cities since the 1970s. These centres, which usually consist of several performing spaces of different sizes, are used for a diversity of performances – from grand opera to small-scale experimental theatre. In the 1990s and into the new millennium, similar major performing arts centres were constructed in a number of Asian cities. Some were designed to become architectural icons, for example, Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts; others are more utilitarian in appearance but serve the same function. While centres vary in scale and design, they are essentially based around one model: a purpose-built venue that houses spaces to enable the performance of music, theatre and opera (and sometimes cinema). Some also house an art gallery or a small museum or specialist library within the centre.

These centres are expensive to build and are usually expensive to maintain (Bonet, Cubelles & Roselló 1997). Some have permanent companies attached to them; others are purely venues that may or not adopt an entrepreneurial role to filling their spaces. Ensuring that the centre's various performance spaces are filled with interesting work and attracting paying audiences for most days of the year, is an ongoing challenge. Many centres have a direct relationship with government (national, state or local or a combination) where they are funded, governed and/or seen as an official representative of the state or city. This may bring its own challenges re programming and creativity (Frey 2002). There may be also expectations of the centre by government in terms of access, policy directives and responsibilities, not necessarily congruent with the process of making art (Boerner & Jobst 2011; Turbide & Laurin 2009). On the other hand, if there is little or no state subsidy, then the challenge to stay financially solvent may be even greater (given the cost of just keeping the doors open). As the model of these arts centres originated in western countries it might be interesting to

consider if they fit within an Asian cultural 'construct'. Do the same leadership challenges present themselves in different cultural contexts and are they dealt with in a similar manner?

In terms of leadership, the director of the centre may be little more than a manager who ensures that the books are balanced; alternatively, the director may be an active producer/entrepreneur who envisions a creative and expansive role for the centre (Bilton & Leary 2002; Caust 2010; Creese 1997). In addition, there is often a core tension for the leader between the demands of making art and the practical reality of making ends meet (Caust 2010; Cray et al 2007). Centre outcomes may therefore be determined by the leader's understanding of their role or by the type of individual (and his or her skill base) appointed to the position. If the leader has a transformational style, they usually possess clarity of vision and the courage to undertake often radical change in the face of opposition from many sides (Bilton & Leary 2002; Ekvall 2002). At the same time the leader has to develop the commitment and trust of the staff to support the change and build the capacity in them to work together to achieve it. For example, it has been noted that contemporary creativity models depend on collaboration rather than competition (Hewison & Holden 2011). As Byrnes notes, in the context of a complex arts environment such as a performing arts centre, '...a leader with great skill as a transformational leader and negotiator will be required' (Byrnes 2003: 170)

Many arts contexts, particularly more contemporary examples, demonstrate a leadership model or organizational structure where leadership may be shared or distributed and is located around a more collaborative model than a conventional hierarchy (Caust 2013; Gronn 2008; Reid & Karambayya 2009). The positional leader may then involve everyone in owning the process, where he or she demonstrates superior communication skills and possesses the capacity to work successfully with many kinds of people. Leaders must have the skills necessary to persuade those around them to accept and support a shared vision; the leader must also have the ability to encourage their followers to work collaboratively towards the realisation of the vision (Ansell & Gash 2012). In addition, the leader must be able to share the leadership spotlight and allow others to take the leadership role when

required. This requires a trusting, respectful, environment which is focussed on achieving the outcomes for the arts centre rather than focusing on the ego needs of an individual leader.

So, what are the expectations of the role of the leader in these arts centres and what type of skill base is most suited to the role? This research addresses specific examples of leadership in four major performing arts centres in the Asia Pacific region and discusses the different individual approaches, backgrounds and values of their leaders. It considers the expectations placed on the centres by funders, audiences and arts communities and the challenges this may place on the leaders (Beirne & Knight 2002). It notes the different choices made by the leaders to ensure the survival or growth of their centres and discusses these in the context of different cultures, locations and expectations placed upon the centres.

Challenges

The role a performing arts centre plays within its community is a key issue when selecting an appropriate leadership model for it. Certainly, the building of such a centre by a city, state, national government or even private benefactor is usually an assertion of a local identity. The very existence of such a centre in a city could be viewed as locating that city on the cultural, political and economic map. A city may not be viewed as significant unless it has a large performing arts centre for proud display to visitors. This centre therefore encapsulates the notion that the possession of a major cultural edifice gives its city higher status, value and power. Florida notes that when people make choices about where they want to live, ‘... the economic and lifestyle considerations both matter, and so does the mix’ (Florida 2002: 223). The benefits of providing a healthy economic environment may not be enough to attract labour (especially skilled) and even investment; lifestyle benefits in a location are equally important. Recognising that a city will benefit from the provision of good cultural facilities makes good economic sense.

If the aim of the centre is to assert the power and status of the city, then it must also demonstrate the city or nation's highest artistic and cultural achievements and/or provide a place for the display of the high arts from other countries from around the world. Thus, the existence of the centre and the kind of spaces it houses provide both a home for the 'high' and/or 'best' art as well as a place for the 'élite cognoscenti' to attend and be seen. The relationship therefore between the centre and its home is complicated. It is both a cultural centre and a status symbol. It is of cultural significance but also of economic and political importance.

Another dimension is the relationship the centre has with local artists. Does the centre embrace local arts activity, or does it exclude it from the centre? Many arts practitioners may view the prospect of the establishment of a performing arts centre in their city or town with pleasure and approval and consider it to be an acknowledgement of the value of the arts in their community. However, the concept of a performing arts centre is likely to be more complicated than this; there is no guarantee that, in addition to its role as a presenter of work, such a centre will be an actual producer of 'art' as such, nor will it necessarily embrace local arts activity. The focus of the leadership may be about producing popular entertainment that guarantees the seats are filled. Furthermore, the costs of the centre, including the initial building and its ongoing maintenance are likely to be extremely high, consuming funds that could otherwise be directed to arts practice or other community undertakings. The very large capital investment made by the state or city in the building also implies a long-term obligation or responsibility to the patrons who funded its construction.

A close association between a cultural centre and its political masters can be problematic for those responsible for the cultural centre. Arts-making involves risk. Any arts activity, even if it is commercial musical theatre, involves risk. The size of this risk can vary, but, because of its very public face, it is always a source of embarrassment if it fails. Taste is fickle and culturally located. Something that is successful in one place may be a failure in another. Whether a centre chooses to be entrepreneurial in its approach or is merely a venue for hire, some degree of risk is involved. This risk

is exacerbated when the centre is entrepreneurial and sees its role as a cultural incubator as well as a venue. An interesting question here is how does the leader of such a performing arts centre manage this risk and choose a path that ensures the success of the centre, both artistically and financially?

Michael Kaiser, who is the President of the Kennedy Arts Centre in Washington, believes that:

It all starts and ends with a focus on programming. There is no reason for an arts organization to exist unless it does important programming (Kaiser 2008: 177). When Kaiser took up his position of Executive Director of the Royal Opera House in 1998, he was confronted by a multiple array of compounding issues, including a very expensive rebuilding program, complex governance, constant media attention, political pressure and an arts centre designed to serve several masters. This scenario was compounded by the British media who took a close interest in the Opera House and interpreted every problem as an outcome of incompetent administration. Moreover, because the Royal Opera House occupied such a significant position in the cultural and social life of the nation, everyone, from the Queen to the Prime Minister, to a teacher at a local comprehensive school, had a view about the centre's role and the activities that should be taking place there. The reality of managing large arts centres with direct connections with the government of the day demonstrates that art and politics are irrevocably interconnected. Boards and committees may be peopled by the most powerful individuals in the city or country and need to be managed and persuaded to follow a pathway sometimes not necessarily amenable to them. This could be a particularly challenging task if, in the case of board members, their own money as donors is also involved.

Approach

In this research the focus is on the leadership of four arts centres that are all members of the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres (AAPPAC). The Association has over 40 full members from arts centres in countries across the Asia Pacific region including China, Japan, Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, Macau, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines. The leaders of four of their member centres (Adelaide, Auckland, Daejeon and Singapore) agreed to be

interviewed by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The interviews and underlying research has taken place over the years 2012 – 2014. The leaders were either interviewed ‘face to face’ or sent a series of questions by email and were asked to address a similar range of issues. One leader is the founding director of the centre he leads (Benson Puaah, Singapore), another has been in the role for 8 years (Douglas Gautier, Adelaide), a third has been in the role just over a year (Dr Yong Kwan Lee, Korea) and the fourth has been in his current role for 4 years (Robbie Macrae, Auckland). They are all male and are all in the latter part of their working careers. The arts centres they lead are different in terms of age, location, design and venue capacity but they are similar in that they offer a variety of spaces primarily focused around the delivery of the performing arts. One is located in a large city state (Singapore), another in the largest city of a country (New Zealand) and two are in regional cities of their countries (Australia and South Korea).

Leaders of Art Centres

Benson Puaah, *Esplanade -Theatres on the Bay*, Singapore

The *Esplanade -Theatres on the Bay* in Singapore opened in October 2002. Singapore as a city-state had a population of 5.3 million recorded in 2012. The *Esplanade* has five main venues: a theatre (capacity 1942), concert hall (capacity 1811), outdoor theatre (capacity 450) and two flexible spaces, the theatre studio (capacity 220) and the recital studio (capacity 245). There is also a performing arts library and a two exhibition spaces. There were 247 people employed at the *Esplanade* in 2014. In addition, *the Esplanade* is home to several restaurants, cafes, shops and even spas. Benson Puaah, the Chief Executive Officer of the *Esplanade*, is an unusual person in the arts sector as the major part of his working career was spent in hotel management. He was invited by a senior government bureaucrat in the Singapore Cultural Ministry to take on the development and leadership of the *Esplanade* while it was still a hole in the ground. However, Puaah’s professional goals had already changed before he arrived at the *Esplanade* as he had just been leading a government linked initiative that invested in the health sector and life sciences.

Puah's overall focus is imbued with how he can benefit Singapore. Despite his background in hotels he revealed he had grown up with a deep love of the arts. When he took on the position of CEO of the *Esplanade* his vision for the eventual centre was not what one would expect. He says,

It was never my intention to develop *Esplanade* just as an art centre...My vision for *Esplanade* was for it to be a catalyst for social transformation (Puah in interview 2012 & 2014).

He is demonstrating here that he wanted the *Esplanade* to be more than its parts. He saw it as a means of transforming the city state that he lived in. But when the centre was being developed there was not a history in Singapore of people who had been trained or worked in a professional capacity in such an entity. He said in fact that,

We didn't have technical theatre staff. We didn't have anyone actually who has ever worked in an art centre (ibid).

So, they were not merely starting from a hole in the ground; they also had to train and develop all the staff that would be running the centre in the longer term.

As they were determined to make the *Esplanade* a leader in cultural activity internationally, this was a tremendous series of challenges for Puah. When asked him about his approach to leadership he responded that,

I believe in 'servant' leadership... I often say to my team, the credit is always yours, the blame is for me to shoulder. ...Good leadership is collective leadership in many ways (ibid)

So he sees himself as a leader who leads from the rear but is there to work collegiately and support his team under all circumstances. This extends to encouraging self-motivation within the team members so that they are able to make decisions themselves without having to rely on him. He believes that greater job satisfaction occurs if people have this power and capacity. Puah sees his role as a teacher as well as a leader. He emphasizes the importance of good values particularly the importance of integrity, so the leader is demonstrating by his own behaviour how he expects others to behave. On the other hand he notes that he has very high work standards and that he demands a lot from his team.

He observes though that different industry sectors demand different approaches, and he is aware that his approach in the hotel sector would not have worked in the cultural sector. He says he has to be more forgiving of the ‘untidiness’ of the arts as he puts it.

Another interesting aspect of Puah’s approach is that he does not regard the *Esplanade* as a business but as a cultural institution. In the case of the *Esplanade* government funding as well as income from the Singapore Totalizer Board (tied to community programs) provides around 45-50% of their revenue so that they then need to earn around another 50%. But the bottom line for Puah is not about reaping profits but about contributing to the social good. This view extends to how the centre functions in regard to say seeking favour from certain sectors by handing out complimentary seats. He believes this is unnecessary and expects everyone to pay for their seats including political leaders and leaders of industry. His egalitarian approach extends to programming also. He wants the centre to be a place where everyone feels comfortable, not just an élite. So he offers regular free concerts and tries to encourage participation from all sectors in the activities of the centre.

Another facet of this is developing audience behaviour that is respectful to the performers. Again, Puah sees his role in both an educational and cultural construct as his notes,

The intent actually is to influence the aural and visual aesthetic of the public ...it is actually our own subtle way to balance the landscape so that it’s not dominated by western influences...in many eastern cultures traditional practices are part and parcel of the daily rituals of life (ibid).

There is certainly a sense Puah is on a ‘mission’ here. He seems to be trying to push the boundaries of his community and sees the *Esplanade* as a location for the validation and respect for eastern arts, rather than seeing it as a temple for the practice of western art.

Finally, he talks about his responsibility to local art and local artists. He notes that there was disappointment from the local artistic community when the *Esplanade* reached its fruition because

they felt that the size of the venue spaces was not sympathetic to the needs of smaller local arts organizations. Puah acknowledges this but comments that the centre is not just the venues but the foyers and the concourses where many community activities occur constantly. He is conscious of the need to support local arts activity and enable it to be part of the *Esplanade* whenever he can and maintains that,

...we do have a very strong local development program in it where we commission work, we support our local artists, and we help them collaborate with other artists (ibid)

Benson Puah was acknowledged for his contribution to the arts sector by being elected Chair of the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres from 2003 to 2013 and was elected Chair of the International Society for the Performing Arts from 2008 to 2009.

Douglas Gautier and the Adelaide Festival Centre, Australia

Adelaide is the capital of the state of South Australia with a population of 1.2 million and has had a reputation as a national centre for culture and arts practice. Its performing arts centre, the *Adelaide Festival Centre*, was constructed in the early 1970s before similar centres, including the Sydney Opera House, were completed in other Australian capital cities. The Centre has three main performing venues as well as a small art gallery and outdoor amphitheatre and employs around 330 people. The Festival Theatre has a capacity of 2000, the Playhouse has a capacity of 590 and the Space holds up to 350 in a flexible configuration. In addition to the main venues in the *Festival Centre* itself, the centre is also responsible for the management of another theatre, Her Majesty's Theatre, which opened in 1913 and has a capacity of 970.

The current CEO Douglas Gautier was appointed to the position in 2006. He is originally from Adelaide and his first profession was that of an actor. After leaving Adelaide he went to work in radio production for the BBC in London. He was then transferred to Hong Kong where he helped set up a new classical music radio station. He continued to work in Hong Kong over many years, most recently running the Hong Kong Arts Festival. In an interview in 2008, Gautier claimed that

curatorial control of an arts centre is critical and noted that: ‘... if an arts centre is to function properly it must be allowed to be master of its own destiny’ (Gautier quoted by Strahle 2008: 16).

Gautier believes that an arts centre should be constantly active and alive, so he has been committed to introducing new and varied audiences into the centre. Instead of concentrating solely on the high art end of town he has encouraged young people, those from ethnically diverse backgrounds and those who had never been to the arts centre during their lifetime, to attend events there. In addition, he persuaded the State Government to absorb debts of more than 30 million dollars that had been hanging over the Centre for many years. For his achievements at the *Adelaide Festival Centre* Gautier was profiled in the first edition of the journal, *Managing the Arts Worldwide* in 2008, with his picture embellishing the front cover of the magazine. In addition, in 2013 Gautier was elected Chair of the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres.

When Gautier took up the role at the *Adelaide Festival Centre*, he inherited a centre that had been run efficiently from a fiscal perspective but many of its spaces were ‘dark’ for much of the year. So, he was determined to change this by keeping the *Adelaide Festival Centre’s* spaces as busy as possible and ensure they were open most of the time. He also introduced two new festivals: the OzAsia Festival and the Guitar Festival. Gautier believes that arts centres such as the *Adelaide Festival Centre* have a major role to play in their society, as a source of both civic pride and cultural contribution. But his view about the value of the arts can be at odds with others in the community.

For example, he says,

A major challenge has been the lack of recognition (by some) of the value of the arts to a city community (Gautier in interview 2014)

Perhaps this is always the case that the value of the arts is a contested space. But it also might reflect a blasé attitude by a community to an entity that has been in the city for a long time compared to other arts centres represented here. A city that has only recently built an arts centre will feel a great deal of pride in it, but one that has been around for a long time may seem ‘old hat’ and not worth treasuring.

When discussing the role of arts centres, Gautier talks about the business side of the equation and how crucial it is to get the commercial side right. In the case of the *Adelaide Festival Centre*, while it receives state government funding, it still needs to earn at least 70% of its overall income to survive, so the commercial pressure is great. He acknowledges the complexity of the mission of arts centres, given their multiple stakeholders and varied expectations, which makes the role of the leader challenging. While Gautier still believes in a ‘program led strategy’, which he espoused when he took on the position in 2006, his focus now on commercial pressures indicates the constant dichotomies faced by leaders of these centres. They may want to take artistic risks but at the same time they must meet their income needs.

Gautier has a view that Australia needs to engage a great deal more with its geographical region and celebrate the fact that this is where it sits. For this reason, Gautier began the OzAsia Festival and he has a vision that the *Adelaide Festival Centre* will be ‘a national hub for Asian/Australian engagement’. He is developing further programs including cultural exchanges with Shandong province in China and an Asian internship program. When talking about cultural differences in relation to arts leadership, Gautier says that while he does not like to generalise, he has observed a more ordered or collegial approach in Asian arts centres while, at the same time, there may be less ambiguity. As he notes, every cultural framing has its own characteristics, so for example the Australian culture can produce great teamwork and creativity, but it can also encourage more individualistic and competitive behaviour. In terms of his own leadership style, Gautier mentions the importance of teamwork and ownership by the individuals of projects at the *Festival Centre*.

Dr Yong Kwan Lee, Daejeon Culture & Arts Centre, South Korea

The city of Daejeon has a population of 1.5 million and is in the centre of South Korea. The *Daejeon Culture & Arts Centre* was opened in 2003 and has two main venues, the Arts Hall (seating capacity 1546) and the Ensemble Hall (seating capacity 643). The *Daejeon Centre* also has a nursery, a

Convention Hall and an amphitheatre. In addition, the *Daejeon Centre* has its own Arts Academy which delivers training in theatre, music and dance to both adults and young people. This training role of the centre is unusual when compared to activities at other arts centres. The *Daejeon Culture & Arts Centre* is a government funded organisation and is under the overall control of the Daejeon Metropolitan City Government. The Daejeon Centre receives around 82% of its income from grants so that its earned income only represents around 16-18% of its overall revenue. There are around 50 employees at the centre.

The present CEO of the *Daejeon Centre* is Dr Yong Kwan Lee. Lee has only recently taken on the leadership role at the *Daejeon Centre*, becoming its CEO in April 2013. Lee initially worked in the sales area of a large newspaper, the *Joongang Daily News* in Seoul. Interestingly the newspaper had its own arts gallery and theatre venue. This is where Lee began working in arts management. He also later trained formally in arts management and completed a PhD in arts management in 2004. He sees himself as a specialist now in theatre and arts management and he believes this specialist knowledge gives him an advantage in his present position. In fact, he notes,

...leadership of non-profit sectors such as the arts requires much more professional expertise and sensitivity than profit-oriented areas. That's because arts sectors need to focus on the missions for art promotion and maximizing the enjoyment of arts and culture by people. (Lee in interview 2014)

So Lee sees his role as that of a specialist with a high degree of responsibility. He thinks that arts leadership in general requires special skills and a high degree of sensitivity towards the various stakeholders. He notes that "...leadership in this area should be delicate and sophisticated" (Lee 2014). While arguing for a high degree of care in the role, he does not believe in micro-managing and thinks staff should be allowed to get on with their job. However he notes his supervisory relationship varies depending on the perceived competency of the individual.

Lee believes strongly in the importance of good programming as a core leadership characteristic of arts centres. He also has a high commitment towards the education role of the centre. Given that the centre runs an arts training program, this aspect of the centre's activity is obviously another key aspect of his role. He thinks an ideal outcome is where the work being presented is of high artistic merit and, at the same time, the venues are full and the audiences are happy. He does not think there is a contradiction between artistic value and audience popularity, believing that both can be achieved simultaneously. But he says he is always trying to maintain a balance between the two needs, and he says that this can be a struggle because he would not try to favour one need over the other.

Nevertheless, Lee talks about the inherent tension in running an arts facility between the 'art' side of the exercise and the 'revenue' side. He notes that this tension is an issue in relation to the government which funds the centre, and to whom he is ultimately responsible. Lee says that this relationship also needs special care given that governments expect good fiscal management.

As a leader he likes to focus on the big picture, and let others get on with the details. He encourages 'dialogue' between everyone to address any internal issues but notes that at times he has to be more directional and supervisory in his relationship, depending on both the individual staff member's competency and loyalty. When the *Daejeon Centre* achieves success, he sees this as something that everyone involved should share and take pleasure in. However, Lee acknowledges that leadership may be perceived in a different way in an Asian context than in the West. He thinks this may be related to Confucian values around the importance of community, obedience within a hierarchy, and overall loyalty to the leader. In particular he notes there is less emphasis on the importance of the individual in an Asian context.

Robbie Macrae, *Auckland Live* or *The Edge*, Auckland, New Zealand

Auckland is the largest city in New Zealand and has a population of 1.5 million. *The Edge* now known as *Auckland Live* houses several venues in different locations. They include the Aotea Centre, the Herald Theatre (capacity 186) Auckland Town Hall, The Civic (capacity 2,378) , Aotea Square,

the Bruce Mason Centre (capacity 1119), QBE, the Smart Stadium (capacity 40,000) and the Western Springs Stadium (capacity 60,000). They are all are part of the larger entity called Regional Facilities Auckland. It began life in 1990 when the Aotea Centre opened and when it embraced Auckland Town Hall in 1997, it became known as the *Edge*. It changed its name again in May 2014 to *Auckland Live* no doubt acknowledging the additional venues under the one banner. Robbie Macrae has been General Director at *Auckland Live* for 4 years but was previously their Director of Programming, so he has been there for 10 years in total. He has worked previously in the airline industry as well as in other arts centres but started his working life as a lighting technician, having completed a Commerce Degree. The model that *Auckland Live* presents is different to the other arts centres in this research, as it has multiple venues under the one umbrella, not just one venue with multiple spaces.

While Macrae says the arts sector has some special needs, particularly for a leader in relation to emotional intelligence and managing change, he thinks the expectations of leaders are similar in different sectors. He sees the key role of a leader of an arts centre located around finding the right artistic product for the right audience. In relation to attributes of an arts leader he describes himself as an introvert who problem solves by taking a step back, staying calm, and then working it out strategically. Macrae is committed though to working in the arts and is in the job he always wanted to be in.

As he leads a staff of more than 120 (plus several hundred casual employees) he says it is essential to delegate. In his own approach he keeps a hand on the 'big picture' but expects those underneath him to do their job without his interference. For Macrae, there are two major rewards in his role: celebrating an artistic and audience success that he may have brought to *Auckland Live*, and making the organisation work successfully both as a business as well as an arts producer. In Macrae's case the need for it to work as a business is more pronounced than the others. *Auckland Live* only receives 10% of its income from government; the rest (90%) must be earned at the box office or elsewhere.

Given the multitude of venues and variety of needs that are being served, the magnitude of this task must be quite challenging.

He noted that the vision of *Auckland Live* has changed recently from seeing itself as a ‘facilitator’ to that of a ‘cultivator’. This appears to mean that *Auckland Live* is taking more of a proactive approach to both its programming and its relationship with its audience. He says that the arts can have a transformative impact on people’s lives, and this is how he sees the role of the arts centre. But he acknowledges that others in the community may not share this view. In that case he says you need to make economic arguments that demonstrate the benefit of an arts centre to the community. In fact he says that the greatest challenge in his role is around convincing others about the value of the undertaking.

The continual challenge is getting others to believe in what you do and the value you bring to your community (Macrae in interview 2014).

Outcomes

Three out of the four leaders worked for large parts of their careers in other sectors apart from the arts: Macrae in the aviation industry, Lee in sales in the newspaper sector and Puah in hotel management. However, for many years they have all seen the arts as their home. In Puah’s case, he only came into the arts sector to run the *Esplanade*. Gautier, Macrae and Lee talk about their role as one which is complex but satisfying, reflecting their passion and engagement with the arts. They see themselves as arts specialists who have developed a broad raft of knowledge that helps them perform the complex roles they are now in. All of them see the role of arts in an almost missionary way as a power for transformation, pleasure, and learning.

Apart from Puah, they all reflect the challenge within their roles of producing interesting art, attracting a paying audience, and keeping the books balanced, as well as demonstrating value to the community in which the arts centre sits. Puah is adamant that the *Esplanade* is not a business centre,

nor an arts centre but a cultural institution with a mission to contribute to the social good. In fact he sees it as a place that offers more than this – it offers social transformation. While the other three leaders might have the same view about their centres, it seems that there may be more pressure on them externally to justify their activities. This may imply that the role the *Esplanade* plays in the social and cultural fabric of Singapore is well understood and valued by its political masters.

Macrae talks about needing to make economic arguments to demonstrate the value of what they do, Lee talks about an expectation of good fiscal management, and Gautier stresses the critical nature of commercial imperatives. A major difference between the four leaders is their income ratios. While Lee has to earn around 18% of his income, Macrae has to find 90%, Gautier has to find 70% and Puah around 50%. The degree of subsidy versus the amount of income needed to balance the books, is one key to the kind of pressures these leaders may be under from their stakeholders. Certainly, the very public nature of these centres means that the role of the leader is exposed and very public. They are continually under review by the press, politicians, powerful individuals, and the public. To survive this pressure the leader must be clear about their vision and pursue it in the face of many obstacles or challenges. When they experience problems, the public response may not be sympathetic. These centres have to stay in a healthy financial position, or the leader will come under pressure from the media, the government and the centre's governing body.

Each of the leaders talks about the importance to them of teamwork and collaboration to achieve results for their centres. They are all conscious that they cannot achieve success in their centres without the engagement and commitment of the staff that they lead. Macrae comments that he sees his role as keeping his eye on the big picture while trusting his staff to get on with their jobs. In a large organization it is critical of course to delegate and allow staff a great deal of autonomy. There is not time to be a micro-manager. Lee mentions the importance of everyone sharing in a success. Gautier talks about the need for people to own their work. Puah talks about the role of the leader as that of a teacher who is there to encourage staff to take more responsibility and be confident enough

to make their own decisions. Interestingly Lee mentions his expectations around loyalty and competency, suggesting that as a leader, he has to respect and trust his staff before he hands over complete responsibility to them.

When discussing cultural differences Lee mentions that he thinks Asian workplaces tend to be more hierarchical and collegiate in their structure and behaviour. This is also reflected by Gautier who notes that he has observed less ambiguity in working relationships in Asian contexts and more collegiality. On the other hand, Gautier is conscious that an Australian workplace can encourage individual competitiveness that may be harmful to the organization's mission, but on the other hand, he believes that the emphasis on individualism can also support creativity. Puah also talks about the importance of collegiality in the working environment and notes, that as the leader, he is transparent and so there is a necessity for the leader to model good values to their followers such as integrity.

These case studies demonstrate that these leaders exhibit transformational characteristics in their approach to their leadership; they are also successful negotiators in the context of many different stakeholders, and they bring people with them in achieving their task (Byrnes 2003). As Byrnes notes, survival in a leadership role in a complex arts organization requires sophisticated negotiation skills and political acumen (Byrnes 2003). Each of the leaders talk about the need for all of their team to take credit for success, own outcomes and work collaboratively (Ansell & Gash 2012; Caust 2013; Gronn 2008; Reid & Karambayya 2009). The need to work collegially and not competitively is seen as essential in the arts environment (Hewison & Holden 2011). While there are different nuances in their interpretation of this, there does not seem to be much difference in this expectation cross culturally.

All of these leaders raise issues around the challenges in balancing their roles in terms of stakeholder demands (Boerner & Jobst 2011; Frey 2002). If their major funder is a government or local authority, then there is particular pressure to conform to the needs of the funders which may not necessarily

relate to the priorities of making art (Turbide & Laurin 2009). There is also evident tension articulated by three of the leaders between the role of an arts centre as a producer of art and running the centre successfully as a business (Caust 2010; Cray et al 2007). This would seem to be a core issue for all leaders in the arts.

Conclusions

Leadership of arts centres is not a simple task. There are conflicting forces, a high degree of public exposure and many expectations embedded in the fabric of an arts centre within any community. The higher profile of the centres intensifies these pressures. So the leaders must be passionate and pragmatic; strong as leaders but able to delegate and allow others to lead too.

The challenges implicit in adopting a creative, entrepreneurial approach to the role is considerable. The leader of a large performing arts centre has to be clear and determined in his or her vision for it to prevail; at the same time, they must be a skilled and sophisticated negotiator to accommodate many different stakeholders. In addition, making a centre a hub of artistic creative activity has risks attached that can impact on the audience, the governance and ultimately the leadership of the centre. Financial imperatives hang over arts centres given their size, complexity, and community expectations. Nevertheless, performing arts centres can be more than an edifice for the performing arts that every city needs. They can also be a centre for making or enabling exciting arts practice.

While large performing arts centres began as a structural model in the west, they have now been embraced in many countries in the Asia Pacific region. From the comments here the challenges embedded in leading these centres are similar in different cultural contexts. The organizational model and cultural expectations of the leaders may differ slightly but overall, the expectations in the role are similar. The question though of whether large purpose-built arts centres are appropriate for different cultural contexts has not been addressed in this study and could be the subject of further work.

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