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# Skilful Coping with Unorder: Educating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts Leadership

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## Abstract

This paper firstly addresses why innovative learning approaches are needed for 21st century leadership education in the arts and cultural sector, then moves on to a case study of how such approaches are being implemented in practice, in the Boosting Resilience project. The approaches taken here are characterised as involving a multi-disciplinary consortium of delivery partners; the use of constructivist pedagogy that draws on arts-based methods of delivery; a participatory and agile learning design process; and the incorporation of on-going evaluation activities, that are woven in to the process of design. The paper concludes with some discussion regarding the potential generalisability of approaches such as those employed on the Boosting Resilience project to arts and cultural leadership education more broadly.

## 1. Context

As context to the case study of 21<sup>st</sup> century arts leadership education presented below, we first set out our understanding of unorder, and responses to the challenges this entails in management education in general.

### The State of Unorder

This paper takes as its context an environment with the constant possibility, not simply of being complex or unpredictable, but actually on the edge of a state known as “unorder”. By and large 20<sup>th</sup> century leadership education has done a reasonably good job of addressing the problems of the relatively settled post-war period, a time of “order”. Enormous progress was made in management of production and distribution. Innovation, both technological, intellectual and artistic, has continued in many economies at a surprisingly high rate. This postwar state up to 1989 could be summarised as SCSC (stable, certain, simple, clear). With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 paralleled by Middle East crises, a new term was coined (Johansen, 2012, Gerras, 2010). This describes the opposite of SCSC: VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous).

The term VUCA has not achieved a great deal of traction in either business schools or consultancies; a key reason is possibly that VUCA cannot be readily addressed in the conveniently formulaic way that could be applied to the problems of distribution and production. Educational responses to VUCA have been quite narrowly considered, and surprisingly little work exists on the pedagogy needed to prepare students and managers for a VUCA world. With our focus on leadership

education, we draw on Dreyfus (2005) and his concept that high level professional expertise is not about formulaic rule following, but rather “skilful coping”.

The framework we draw on for reviewing order and disorder is that developed by David Snowden, (Snowden and Boone, 2007, Snowden, 2016). An attraction of Snowden’s framework is that unlike a number of others which address VUCA, it explicitly and elegantly discusses the nature of knowledge involved. It relates to two states, namely order and unorder, divided into five domains, two of order (obvious and complicated) and three of un-order (complex, chaotic and disorder). In the state of order, normal science typically applies. This is far from the case in the state of unorder. The boundary between obvious and chaotic is represented as a metaphorical cliff – there is a constant possibility that the obvious will degrade into chaos. The framework can be regarded as a progression (Figure 1) from Obvious to Disorder, unfolded into the five domains:



Figure 1: Five domains of order/unorder

Much of Snowden’s work is in the public sector, which faces problems of security, health, migration, climate, public safety, urbanisation, all of which are frequently subject to the state of unorder, and which have been dubbed “wicked” (Rittel and Webber, 1974) since they are not amenable to the type of obvious and complicated problem solving which has been successfully applied across all sectors of the economy. In recent years, social agencies, including charities, and arts and cultural organisations which may be dependent on the public sector, have been significantly affected by the fallout from unresolved wicked problems, not least through the widespread impact of public sector austerity.

We have found it useful to characterise VUCA as relating to the domain of unorder, while SCSC relates to the domain of order, as shown in Table 1.

Contrasting Elements		Bennett and Lemoine <sup>1</sup> Definitions
Unorder	Order	
Volatility	Stability	The challenge is unexpected or unstable and may be of unknown duration, but it’s not necessarily hard to understand. Knowledge about it is often available
Uncertainty	Certainty	Despite a lack of other information, the event’s cause and effect are known. Change is possible but not a given.
Complexity	Simplicity	The situation has many interconnected parts and variables. Some information is available or can be predicted, but the volume or nature of it can be overwhelming to process.
Ambiguity	Clarity	Causal relationships are completely unclear. No precedents exist; you face “unknown unknowns.”

Table 1: VUCA definitions from Bennett and Lemoine (2014) with SCSC contrast.

Much has been written about VUCA, but less about the relationship between VUCA and SCSC. We see this relationship as important to coping with VUCA in a world that still has many areas where SCSC continues to apply.

## Responses to Unorder in Management Education

Conventional management degrees have heavily focused on preparing students for an SCSC world. However, a small number of programmes have aimed more at equipping students for the more VUCA experiences they may encounter. One example of such a programme is the Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership (the MICL), which was explicitly set up post 2008 in a context of disorder, and chaotic and complex events. Jones et al (2017) have characterised the MICL in terms both of its fundamentally interdisciplinary approach, and of its use of constructivist pedagogy and experiential arts-based methods, arguing that the course provides a strong basis for students and alumni to operate effectively in a complex and changing world.

Interdisciplinary thinking has been associated with the ability to cope with complexity (Spelt et al 2009) and develop solutions to complex problems (Blackwell et al 2010). An interdisciplinary approach also enables students to respond to ambiguity by supporting 'multiple framing' - *'the ability to work intellectually with fundamentally different, sometimes mutually incompatible, analytical perspectives'* (Colby et al, 2011, p.8). Finally, we argue that volatility in the world requires individuals and organisations to innovate in order to adapt, and Blackwell et al (2010) have suggested that innovation thrives in an interdisciplinary setting.

Constructivist, experiential approaches, that can draw on methods commonly used in the arts, have been suggested to be important in facilitating the integration of perspectives from a range of different disciplines (McEwan et al, 2009), and are also strongly associated with reflection, discussed below.



Figure 2: Performance and artefact making as examples of experiential methods used in the Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership

Our approach to developing the Boosting Resilience programme draws on these same principles, as will be described further below.

## 2. Unorder in the Arts and Cultural Sector

Here we explore how and why the arts and cultural sector is an example of unorder. We then go on to consider Arts Council England's response to this, including its national initiative on Building Resilience, and specifically the Boosting Resilience project.

## Background

According to the UK government's recent definition of the Creative Industries Sector Deal (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018), the creative economy in the UK in 2016 accounted for over 3 million, or 1 in 11, jobs in the UK, with the total value of goods and services produced by UK creative industries in 2016 standing at over £91billion, and UK creative industries exports at over £21billion.

However, in our work with a wide range of arts and cultural organisations, we have found that those working within the sector have many concerns that can arguably be attributed to the state of unorder that is in place here, as in other sectors. The area of concern most commonly identified is funding, with many identifying reliance on narrow income streams and austerity-driven threats to public funding as a source of anxiety. Many are also concerned about leadership and capacity or workload, as well as their ability to attract, retain and ensure sufficient training and knowledge support for staff with the requisite skills and expertise, in the context of ongoing changes to the environment in which they operate. There is general unease about organisations' ability to adapt to disruption and unforeseen challenges, and futureproof their work, and finally also about a range of structural and political challenges, including Brexit and global instability, social and cultural disparity, and shifts in cultural consumption and traditional IP landscapes.

## The Need for Resilience

The ability to survive and thrive in such unordered times as those we are presently experiencing is commonly referred to as 'resilience'.

In light of the increasing change and uncertainty in the world at present, it is perhaps not surprising that the topic of resilience is currently of interest in a broad range of contexts. The concept of resilience has been defined by multiple authors, from a range of different disciplinary perspectives, as involving flexibility, and adaptability to changing circumstance; redundancy or tolerance of faults in parts of a system; or finding new ways of doing things or coping with uncertainty. It has relevance both at a personal level, in terms of being able to bounce back from challenges or set-backs, and at an organisational or systems level, in terms of being able to adapt to and withstand change, in the social, economic, and technological contexts in which an organisation operates.

The need for resilience is nowhere more important than in the creative and cultural industries. Resilience is of course important to those already working in the arts and cultural sector, to enable their continued success in contexts such as those described above. An argument has also been made that the creative industries have an important role to play in supporting other sectors. According to a UN report on the creative economy 'when the creative sector becomes part of an overall development and growth strategy, it can contribute to the revitalization of the national economy where hybrid and dynamic economic and cultural exchanges occur and innovation is nurtured' (United Nations, 2013). For example, De Propriis (2013) has argued that the creative industries are crucial for recasting high value-added and high innovation manufacturing in the UK. In addition 'Investing in culture and the creative sector as a driver for social development can also lead to results that contribute to the overall wellbeing of communities, individual self-esteem and quality of life, dialogue and cohesion' (United Nations, 2013). Therefore enabling resilience in the creative and cultural industries may have important knock-on effects in other areas.

In addition, it has been argued that the creative industries are particularly well-placed to maintain resilience, even in these challenging times, both due to the natural propensities of the individuals who work within them, to 'create something from nothing' and find innovative ways to work within new constraints, and because the creative industries tend to be less resource intensive than many other industries, therefore more able to respond to fluctuations or changes in demand (Felton et al, 2010).

## National Initiative on Resilience in the Arts and Cultural Sector

Arts Council England (ACE) defined resilience, in 2013, as follows:

*“Resilience is the vision and capacity of organisations to anticipate and adapt to economic, environmental and social change by seizing opportunities, identifying and mitigating risks, and deploying resources effectively in order to continue delivering quality work in line with their mission”*

Cognisant of the current VUCA context, ACE (2018) continues to prioritise resilience:

*“We want art and culture organisations to be resilient and sustainable. Our aim is for them to become more adaptable to all elements of the external world, including economic conditions and a changing environment”.*

To support this high level objective, Arts Council England (2016) announced a fund entitled “Building Resilience”. This fund aimed at supporting the work of four projects, delivering education and training, to around 100 cultural organisations, with the intention of building their resilience.

This paper reports on the approach taken by one of these projects, funded 2017-2019, entitled Boosting Resilience (BR).

### 3. Boosting Resilience: A Case Study

The findings we report here can be seen as emerging from a programme of action research, in which our research was initiated to solve the immediate problem of educating arts leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our research is an example of research through design, in which our activity in designing the Boosting Resilience programme, and indeed the Boosting Resilience programme itself, are the chief elements in the process of generating and communicating our knowledge in this area.

#### Overall Programme Aims

The Boosting Resilience project is delivering an innovative programme aimed at helping senior staff from arts and cultural organisations across the UK to building their resilience, and the resilience of their organisations, through developing new approaches to making the most of their creative assets. Table 2 below presents extracts from the project overview.

### **The Boosting Resilience Project**

“..aims to design, deliver and evaluate innovative, boundary-pushing and creative learning experiences enabling a wide range of arts and cultural organisations to develop their capacity for resilience and sustainability. The programme will develop new thinking and approaches to seizing opportunities, deploying resources and identifying and mitigating risk. This will help programme participants to anticipate and withstand economic, social, environmental and technological change. .. will focus on developing organisations’ thinking on their creative assets, their existing and potential intellectual property and their abilities to maximize these through working with wider sectors e.g health, education and environment.

Table 2: Boosting Resilience project summary

The project was also unusual in that its learning principles were articulated explicitly, in the form shown in Table 3.

### **The Boosting Resilience Learning Philosophy**

- We value methods and processes developed through artistic practices being deployed in management and organisation development, both in business and non-business sectors. In some areas, arts-based learning provides unique routes to the development of knowledge and skills that is difficult or impossible to achieve through conventional rational learning methods.
- We value diversity and individuality. There are efficiency benefits from standardised learning in cohorts, but wherever possible our aim is to allow individuals to flourish and grow in ways that suit them personally.
- We do not have a traditional perspective of adult education that “teachers” in some sense are more important than “learners”. Both groups bring distinctive contributions to the classroom and both are capable of learning and both are capable of teaching in that classroom.
- Learning needs to draw on a wide toolbox (or palette) of learning tools and technologies; we don’t believe in privileging either digital or analogue approaches.
- There is constant innovation in such tools and technologies and part of our research is into the potential opened by such innovation. We are open to including more innovative approaches but to do so with caution, as we are much less willing to risk undermining student learning and confidence.
- We greatly value what is possible in face to face learning, both one to many and one-to-one. We are also able to introduce good practice from three decades of experience of virtual learning into the physical classroom.
- We strongly believe in
  - Appreciative inquiry
  - Action learning
  - Co-production of knowledge
- We will jointly evolve a protocol on openness/privacy

Table 3: Boosting Resilience educational values

## Programme Outline

The Boosting Resilience project is working directly with leaders from twenty-six arts and cultural organisations of different sizes, from different locations across England, and representing a range of different art forms and cultural activities. It is focusing specifically on enabling organisations to make the most of their existing creative assets and intellectual property, as a means of building their resilience.

The programme being delivered by the project consists of:

- 3 x 2 day residential events, involving a broad range of learning activities of the kinds described below, attended by all of the programme participants, as well as the project team, and supported by a virtual learning environment
- Action learning sets, co-ordinated by members of the project team
- One-to-one pairings of programme participants with mentors in areas of their choice, drawn from a 'Mentor bank' of experts both from academia and the arts and cultural sector
- An open learning programme of events in key areas that are available to individuals from across the arts and cultural sector
- A final conference and showcasing event that will enable the project and its participants to share what has been learnt through the course of the project with the sector as a whole

## Educating for Unorder: Learning Approaches for Leadership Education in the Arts and Cultural Sector

A central dimension of the educational approach taken is that in an age of unorder, there are severe limits to the value of conventional transmissive teaching, regardless of how well it has served in more stable post war decades. This has been emphasised in management education by a wide variety of studies, perhaps most notably from the Carnegie Foundation Study (Colby et al 2011) which particularly emphasised the role of the arts and humanities in developing the practical wisdom of leaders. The Carnegie study outlined a normative model of liberal education, its goals, and its distinctive modes of thinking. These modes are:

- Analytical Thinking,
- Multiple Framing,
- Reflective Exploration of Meaning.

These three modes complement and can be enriched by Practical Reasoning, characteristic of professional education. While analytical thinking is the classic heart of rational and scientific education, multiple framing and the reflective exploration of meaning are much more characteristic of education in the arts and humanities. Practical Reasoning is the "phronesis" which was also seen by the polymath Aristotle (Crisp, 2014) at the very heart of leadership education.

Building on our understanding of the implications of unorder for our educational approach, our underlying learning philosophy, as outlined above, and our previous experience of delivering the Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, we can now characterise the distinctive features of the educational design of the Boosting Resilience programme as involving:

1. A multi-disciplinary consortium of delivery partners
2. Constructivist pedagogy drawing on arts-based learning methods
3. A participatory and agile learning design process
4. Evaluation woven into the design

*Multi-disciplinary Consortium of Delivery Partners*

The proposal submitted envisaged VUCA and wicked problems as requiring extensive and authentic multi-disciplinary working, provided by three partners from three diverse institutions in a consortium (Table 4).

Partner	Lead roles	Expertise	
<b>Business School</b>	Consortium Lead	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Leadership	Learning Innovation
<b>University Centre for Enterprise</b>	Evaluation Lead	Enterprise Education	Action Learning
<b>Arts-Academic Network</b>	Arts Lead	External Relations/ Partnerships	Events & Workshops

Table 4: Boosting Resilience consortium roles

The project team was built up from individuals with diverse backgrounds ranging from accounting and technology to arts management and music conservatoire, with previous experiences ranging from researchers to CEO. Though a major project needs a well-structured project management infrastructure, from the beginning the consortium drew off experiences in conceptualising multi-disciplinary projects in terms of a “Quest” metaphor, which overlaps with the familiar Hero’s Journey, but is distinctive because of its emphasis on a collective rather than an individually heroic focus (Holtham & Courtney, 2006; Barrette, 1999).

Jones et al (2017) describe a number of elements that were used to reinforce the interdisciplinary approach to delivering the Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, including the visible collective presence of faculty team, explicit forms of collaboration across disciplinary boundaries, and shared emphasis on reflection across the programme. These were each echoed in delivering the Boosting Resilience programme. The project team met frequently as a group, on a weekly, and then fortnightly basis, from the beginning of the project, acknowledging the importance of time to develop social capital as being necessary to the success of an interdisciplinary initiative (Blackwell et al 2009, 2010). The project team have also all been present at each of the residentials to date, and have been involved in running Action Learning Sets, providing mentoring for participants and delivering events as part of the Open Learning Programme. Collaboration between the different partners in the project consortium has happened organically, with each partner being involved to a greater or lesser extent in all project work packages. Finally reflection has been a theme of ongoing

importance across the programme, being incorporated into each of the residential events, and also the subject of a course on reflective journaling developed for the Open Learning Programme.

### *Constructivist Pedagogy Drawing on Arts-based Learning Methods*

The word “educating” is used in the title of this paper, not simply because of its everyday meaning, but also because of its historical roots in Latin, with *educere* meaning to “draw out”, as opposed to put in (Bass and Good, 2004). The latter, putting in, is represented by conventional transmissive education. The former, drawing out, is represented by constructivist education (Merriam and Caffarella, R., 1999) and, even more profoundly, transformative education (Mezirow, 2000). It was argued in the project proposal that innovative learning methods would be vital to support constructivism.

Since 2005, the Business School consortium partner had introduced a strand of research and development in teaching and learning, based on the concept that business can and should be viewed through art-based lenses. This approach expanded from the MBA programme to masters, undergraduate and latterly executive education. The theory behind the use of art-based methods (Adler and Delbecq, 2017) includes the importance of reflective experience and of playfulness in executive learning and development.

Arts-based methods have informed many aspects of the learning design for the Boosting Resilience programme, with some specific examples being noted here:

#### **(a) Reflective journaling**

This was initiated at the first residential workshop, and included the use of marks, pictures, sketching and colour, to encourage more innovative problem-solving. It was then decided to offer this through wholly online methods and a completely original module was developed. Though this only attracted less than half the participants, it was able to achieve some profound outcomes for the participants, up to and including chief executive level. It seems that reflective journaling can support leaders at a deep personal level in facing up to the problems of VUCA.

#### **(b) Learning by walking about**

Each of the first two residentials included a group walking activity with presentations. The first was geared to imaginative storytelling, and the second to very close noticing of detail, aided by jeweler’s magnifying lenses. This method is overtly concerned with collective sense-making in the face of extreme ambiguity, imagination and storytelling. As might be expected from experienced arts leaders, these activities were performed extremely well.

#### **(c) Creation of physical artefacts**

Representing knowledge through artefacts, physical and digital, is an important outcome of constructivist learning methods, and use has been made of 2D and 3D methods, including the use of storyboards and plastic building blocks to envision new and valuable uses of existing assets. These methods are rooted in playfulness, a key area in innovation, and of course in the everyday practice of art forms, but perhaps less so in management and leadership.

#### **(d) Play and game approaches**

A board game for individuals was created specifically for the programme on the theme of a journey. Instead of using post-it notes for brainstorming, specially designed and printed luggage labels were

completed individually, curated collectively in the form of an exhibition, and then deployed again individually on the game board.

### *Participatory and Agile Learning Design Process*

Although the overall outline of the Boosting Resilience programme, as described above, was set out in the initial project proposal, we are adopting a codesign approach for the more detailed design of programme content and activities. This involves not only the partners who are delivering the programme, but also the participants themselves, in identifying needs and designing effective interventions. Our approach draws on principles we have previously applied to the design of complex socio-technical systems, in domains such as air traffic control, and the design of new smart services for energy consumers - applying those principles instead to the design of innovative and powerful learning experiences.

Methods used in designing the Boosting Resilience programme have drawn on principles of service design thinking such as those outlined by Stickdorn & Schneider (2010), for example being:

- **User-centred:** thinking about the programme through participants' eyes, and in terms of the participants' needs
- **Co-creative:** including all participants in design process
- **Holistic:** considering the entire environment through which the experience is received
- **Sequencing:** visualising the experience as a sequence of interrelated events

The first phase of the project was to recruit around 25 organisations to participate in the programme, and to this end three "Ideas Pools" were organised in Bristol, London and Manchester, which were geared not only to recruitment but also finding out expectations from prospective participants. The Ideas Pools also drew on the active, high-engagement, learning methods proposed for the main programme.

The detailed educational design was then carried out. A classic model for educational design is ADDIE: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Evaluation (Molenda, 2003), but given the very tight deadlines, small cohort of participants and values of the project, an agile, design thinking, co-design approach was taken (Bass, 2012).

Individuals from the organisations who joined the Boosting Resilience programme have since also been involved in workshops aimed at designing the activities carried out before, during and after the residential events that are forming the backbone of our programme; in a Participant Evaluation Group that designs meaningful approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of what we do; and in sharing their thoughts and reflections after each of our major events, with the aim of informing future delivery. In times of change as rapid as that we are experiencing at present, we must be able to respond quickly to the changing needs of those participating in our programme, and those of the sector as a whole. An iterative, co-design approach to the development of the learning experiences we provide, with ongoing cycles of understanding needs, and evaluating delivery in relation to those needs, is therefore invaluable in this context.



Figure 3: Collecting ideas for the design of the programme as a whole (left), and potential collaborations (right)

### *Evaluation Woven into Design*

Evaluation is a vital aspect of any major project, but often it is done too late in a multi-year project to impact on the project itself. The decision was taken to weave evaluation into the Boosting Resilience project from the start, and this was aided in that the Theory of Change (ToC) evaluation framework (Weiss, 1995) formed part of the substantive content of the learning design itself.

An approach to evaluation using diagnostic tools that built on the experience of all 3 partners was developed during the first 6 months of the project. This approach involved a dedicated evaluation team from the Centre for Enterprise partner entering into ongoing dialogue with project participants throughout the programme's lifetime and so promoting learning and reflection at both individual organisation level and project level. The formative evaluation has been guided by the principles of 'Theory of Change', which have become widely adopted in the evaluation of interventions in the public domain. All stakeholders have been encouraged to articulate their understanding of the project's goals, the mechanisms by which these should be achieved and Intermediate indicators that can provide evidence that it is working.

## 4. Conclusion

The feedback we have received on the Boosting Resilience programme to date has been overwhelmingly positive, with one participant describing it as 'life-changing' and another explaining that '[the residential] was one of the most inspiring pair of days I've had in a very, very long time. I feel genuinely motivated to explore, deepen, consider, and act'. Another participant explained: 'Its become a new way of thinking, acting and progressing in both work and beyond. The embedding of ideas and rationale is quite extraordinary and certainly liberating. The concept of being immersed in great company for a residential certainly works.'

Most of twentieth century management education was concerned with technical methods of optimising efficiency in an economic context of relative stability and overall growth. It did not need either to address unordered, or to equip senior leaders with the personal qualities that would help them deal with unordered. This project, and others with similar aims, set out to re-orientate management education from an efficiency/growth mindset to an unordered/skilful coping mindset.

One unexpected outcome reflects the executive education environment being relatively free of some of the constraints that necessarily limit formal accredited degree programmes. In particular, from a learning technology viewpoint, this project has supported Archer, Anderson, & Garrison's (1999) conclusions that disruptive technology can be implemented more readily in non-degree executive education. The online reflective journaling module had not emerged in relation to formal degree programmes, but was stimulated here by the context of innovation, as well as the co-design process.

It cannot be assumed that arts organisations will necessarily apply making, playfulness and reflection to their own management and leadership practices. But there is certainly a distinct appetite, seen in this project, for less conventional approaches to executive education, including those delivered on an authentic multi-disciplinary basis, and underpinned by innovative learning methods.

This case study has examined, in the context of unorder, the need for:

- A multi-disciplinary approach to leadership education
- Constructivist pedagogy drawing on arts-based learning methods
- A participatory and agile approach to leadership education programme development
- Evaluation woven into the learning design process

Unorder is a function of the broader current climate and context, so we believe the approaches outlined here may be applicable beyond just the Boosting Resilience project participants, and probably beyond the arts and cultural sector. Though there is an increasing application of arts-based methods in business education (Colby et al, 2011), if cultural organisations are to apply them to their own operations then they also become potential providers of such methods to other sectors.

We began by outlining that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a world where SCSC still applies to many technical operations, while VUCA dominates the leadership context. Leaders increasingly have to be able to live and work in both domains, which has almost invisibly created steadily increasing burdens on those leaders, that even their co-workers may be unaware of. Greater attention needs to be paid to supporting such leaders, for example through much more extensive application of coaching, mentoring and action learning methods generally. While leaders are acutely aware of the importance of addressing deficits in marketing and financial management expertise in an era of austerity, they may be surprisingly reluctant to be seen to invest in their own personal capability to cope skilfully. Funders and supporters of arts and cultural organisations need to be willing and able to encourage leaders faced with the world of unorder not to hesitate in equipping themselves to cope.

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