

THE CONFLICT-POSITIVE ORGANIZATION:
SUPPORTING DISSENT AND EMPLOYEE-VOICE FOR
MEANINGFUL ADVANCEMENT OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND
INCLUSION INITIATIVES IN THE ARTS

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Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial

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Abstract

Title of Thesis: THE CONFLICT-POSITIVE ORGANIZATION:
SUPPORTING DISSENT AND EMPLOYEE-VOICE
FOR MEANINGFUL ADVANCEMENT OF EQUITY,
DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES

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Arts organizations working to more effectively identify and address the systemic and institutional barriers preventing diversity, equity, and inclusion within their own institutions should incorporate a conflict-positive internal culture and approach to leadership. This paper highlights the connection between healthy, positive conflict and an individual's and group's ability to more effectively point out and then address the invisible structures of oppression that are interwoven into the very nature of our organizations, systems, and interactions.

The first and second chapters set the context for where the arts sector is in becoming a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse workforce, and why these issues matter for arts organizations. These chapters connect the internal progress arts

organizations have struggled to make to the desirable outcomes of improved community engagement, greater innovation, increased productivity, and better decision making

The third chapter asserts two key points: groups and organizations make better decisions when they engage in healthy conflict and conflict is a necessary and positive force in social justice change-work. Arts organizations must embrace and actively encourage healthy conflict that seeks to highlight injustice, inequity, and the unseen biases that create systemic and institutionalized oppression.

Finally, the last chapter presents a general overview of what conflict-positive means for organizations. This section is a broad-strokes investigation of the internal structures, systems, and strategies that inform the power dynamics and internal culture of an arts organization. It pushes arts administrators to consider and better understand all of the ways these systems influence and inform an employee's and team's willingness to engage in healthy, positive conflict. In addition, this section provides examples and models worth further investigation and consideration by arts organizations seeking to be more intentionally conflict-positive. Arts administrators, leaders, and managers must incorporate conflict-positive systems and strategies through all levels of organizational operations if they wish to implement meaningful change.

The findings of this paper and premises support the following thesis: arts organizations that incorporate a conflict-positive internal culture and approach to leadership can more effectively identify and address the systemic and institutional barriers preventing diversity, equity, and inclusion within their own institutions.

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PREFACE

The value and benefit of healthy conflict is not a new or innovative concept. However, it is a principal that is widely overlooked or feared by arts administrators and managers when dealing with internal organizational issues, especially sensitive, deeply important, and personal issues like internal equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Additionally, the pathway to a conflict-positive organization is complex and requires a great deal of time, attention, and work. While this paper does not claim to offer a how-to guide for implementing a comprehensive conflict-positive internal culture and structure, it does highlight principals, techniques, and pathways that have been pioneered by community organizers, advocacy groups, behavioral psychologists, corporate consultants, and organizations across sectors.

A frequently referenced case study within this paper is the national arts service organization Fractured Atlas. There are two primary reasons for this: first, during the research phase of this paper it became clear that many arts organizations' human resources and management teams were not yet comfortable disclosing, on the record, the ways in which they actively supported or limited either internal employee-to-employee conflict or internal conflict as it related to equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Fractured Atlas was remarkably open to uncensored and on-the-record conversations on this topic.

Secondly, Fractured Atlas is an organization that, upon its founding and for several years after, unintentionally reflected a typical hierarchical, white, male-led arts

organization. While organizations like Alternate ROOTS are exciting models for how a new organization can be founded with innovative power structures and democratic systems, the majority of existing arts organizations currently reflect traditional models and typical power structures. It is these organizations that would most benefit from intentionally adopting conflict-positive approaches to leadership and internal culture. Evident through the interview process, the transition Fractured Atlas has made over the past several years is an intriguing example of a pathway from which many other arts organizations might learn.

It is also imperative to draw additional attention to the ever-evolving sector of social justice advocacy work. The sources referenced in this paper represent a fraction of the organizations, individuals, collectives, and materials available in support of advancing equity, inclusion, and diversity of all types across the arts sector and society as a whole. Although some resources are cited and referenced within this paper, arts administrators should conduct additional research and look within their own communities to find resources and support systems that best fit their own change-initiative needs. Likewise, this paper only encapsulates a small glimpse into the vast equity issues facing communities today, issues and context that will undoubtedly continue to change over time.

This paper is dedicated to my daughter Harlow Corpron.
Your entry into this world is forever tied to my time in this program and
I am eternally grateful for the awe and love you inspire within me.

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A heartfelt thank you to my cohort, the League of Extraordinary Overthinkers. I can say, without hesitation, that your support and friendship has been one of the greatest benefits of this program. I am inspired by every one of you and the work you do. I am a better human for having known and learned from you.

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Introduction

It has long been a bemoaned truth that the administrative staffing of the arts sector is predominately white and the highest levels of leadership often skew male. This truth runs contrary to the overwhelmingly accepted principle that “the arts and the humanities belong to all the people of the United States” (United States, Congress). To combat this inequity, institutions have issued sweeping and decisive public statements on this topic. Arts organizations have unequivocally affirmed that equity is critical to the long-term viability of our sector and they are committed to dramatic shifts in hiring, programs, and training practices. However, progress has been miniscule, if not nonexistent. For example, recent data indicates that arts organizations of color have actually experienced a decrease in institutional funding in the past few years (“Not Just Money”), the gender pay disparity persists (Treviño), and leadership for the majority of foundations and arts organizations continues to be overly homogeneous (“Not Just Money”).

Organizations are undergoing multi-year equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, implementing reformed hiring practices, all while new consulting firms and nonprofits are being established with the sole purpose of supporting the arts sector in reaching diversity goals. These gains are needed and valuable; however, based on recent data, they are not enough. There is a disconnect between the desire and intention to find a solution to the diversity and equity issues facing arts organizations, and the implementation of meaningful change.

To fully comprehend this challenge, it is important to first define the systems and barriers at play. When addressing the causes of inequity within the culture and underrepresentation within the workforce, arts organizations must fully understand and acknowledge the existence of systemic and institutional oppression. “Institutional Oppression is the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person’s membership in the social identity group” (“Institutionalized Oppression”). Institutional oppression is deeply and widely ingrained at every level of society and is systemic in that all members of society uphold the oppression. “Systemic oppression, be it patriarchal, racist or colonialist also exists whether or not, unsurprisingly, individual members of the dominant group/class wish to think they are a part of it or benefit from and facilitate it” (Laxer). It is important to understand that the systemic and institutional barriers for equity, diversity, and inclusion are, by their very nature, so interwoven into the collective culture and society they are likely invisible to individuals who are not negatively affected by or might actually benefit from them.

The results of such systemic oppression and subjugation can and often does boil over into dramatic and atrocious revelations. This has been demonstrated most recently by the #metoo movement in which prominent figures from across sectors of our society have been publicly outed for sexual assault, harassment, and misconduct. This outpouring of personal testimonies recording the long-standing abuse and harassment of women within the workplace has been both powerful and horrifying. Somehow, otherwise conscientious individuals were blind to the cultural and institutionalized systems that reduced women’s voices and autonomy in such obvious ways. The #metoo movement

has been especially prominent amongst creative and entertainment industries, which highlights a serious and deeply ingrained problem for these sectors.

Effectively addressing the disconnect between intention and solution will require more than external statements, the establishment of committees, and the mechanical implementation of new hiring language. The complexity of this process was recently highlighted by facilitator Lara Davis at the 2017 Grantmakers In the Arts daylong pre-conference Racial Equity in Arts Philanthropy. “How does one break the rules? When asked this question, session participants were hard-pressed to come up with clear examples of how to share, let alone cede, power to those outside of our institutions” (Davis). Davis’ observations press arts funders to address the unacknowledged and unseen racial bias that informs where money is distributed in the sector. Addressing this issue will require an honest and uncomfortable reckoning with how arts funders and panels determine value. However, as demonstrated by the participants’ difficulty in responding to Davis’ question, addressing the issue will also require that arts leaders listen to the team-member voices that might better see the “unseen” barriers and thus better see the possible solutions.

With this in mind, arts organizations will need to embrace tactics that allow stakeholders and employees the ability to challenge and dismantle the internal structures and assumptions that act as barriers for effective equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. This will require creating space for individuals to challenge power structures and criticize the strategies and systems organizations have traditionally upheld. Arts organizations must work to establish an environment that welcomes dissent, embraces

conflict as a means of affecting change, and better identifies and addresses the true causes of inequity within their own administrative structures.

The concept of a conflict-positive approach to leadership is not new. Terminology varies slightly depending on the source, be it business blogger, social justice advocate, organization leader, or behavioral psychologist but, nevertheless, there is a common theme: conflict can be positive and necessary when organizations seek to implement internal change. Research shows that a conflict-positive organizational culture and supporting the value of dissent can lead to better decision making. “Through conflict, problems are identified, and solutions created and accepted, and a sense of justice and fairness established” (Tjosvold, “Rights” 13). Additionally, the legacy of work and literature produced by community organizers and social justice activists demonstrates that a conflict-positive approach is a necessary tool in addressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion within organizations.

Arts organizations are, in many ways, well suited to engage in a conflict-positive internal culture. The industry has often engaged in conflict-heavy dialogue through art. Theater companies stage controversial productions to challenge social norms, artists utilize the power of creative expression to stage protests against governments, and educators across the arts sector promote constructive, conflict-positive dialogue through critiques and creative collaboration. The power of creative conflict is embraced when in the pursuit of creative expression and art as a tool for social change. Organizations utilize conflict to engage, inspire, and challenge audiences. While some arts organizations might be more conflict-positive due to the personalities of specific leaders or managers, these instances are often circumstantial and not intentionally implemented. The industry still

overwhelmingly employs rigid, top-down leadership models and approaches to decision making that leave little room for employee dissent and conflict-positive dialogue. Arts organizations do not thoughtfully consider all of the internal systems and structures that can negatively impact organizational culture, nor do they intentionally implement changes to address that impact. Much like the disconnect between the arts sector's intention and efficacy in addressing diversity issues, there is a disconnect between how the arts sector engages and uses conflict externally and how it subdues possible conflict internally.

The positive power of conflict has been elevated by behavior psychologists and organizational researchers and was pioneered by social justice activists as a core principal in effective community and dialogue-building. Conflict-positive processes and systems are essential to any group working together towards a shared purpose. Enabling employee dissent and encouraging conflict-positive dialogue will be integral for arts organizations that hope to make meaningful progress towards more diverse and equitable staffing. By fully investigating these issues, this paper will demonstrate how arts organizations that incorporate a conflict-positive internal culture and approach to leadership can more effectively identify and address the systemic and institutional barriers preventing equity, diversity, and inclusion within their own institutions.

Chapter I

THE CURRENT STATE OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE CREATIVE SECTOR

“There is growing understanding that issues of equity are not only central to the health of our communities, but also to the success and longevity of the arts...art cannot exist without community, and community cannot exist without justice.” - ArtEquity

In recent years, arts organizations of all types and sizes across the United States have made public proclamations in support of meaningful, industry-wide change in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. This commitment to change has come from all levels, influenced by government and private funding, and driven by localized initiatives to more equitably represent the communities arts organizations serve. However, despite these public statements and commitments to change, many organizations continue to struggle with achieving adequate results. Data from different arts sectors and organization types shows this disparity and highlights that the creative sector’s power, wealth, and access remains predominantly white and male. Research also shows that more needs to be done to improve how arts organizations track and then measure success in areas of disability and LGBTQ representation and inclusion.

In 2014 the Association of Art Museum Directors, or AAMD, conducted an in-depth study of the perceived gender gap within the industry. The 2014 report found that “women held less than half of directorships, that the average female director’s salary lagged behind that of the average male director, and that these phenomena were most

persistent in the largest museums” (Treviño 2). This finding comes three years after the AAMD’s previous report on the museum gender gap and despite press attention and field-wide dialogue on the topic. The disparities outlined in AAMD’s 2017 report highlight interesting dynamics between budget size, salary, and organization type. “The majority of museums with budgets of less than \$15 million are run by a female rather than male director, whereas the reverse is true for museums with budgets of \$15 million or more...female representation decreases as budget size increases” (Treviño 2).

Additionally, when compensation is considered relative to operating budget, the study found that female directors tend to have lower salaries than male counterparts (Treviño 2). Although the study shows that pay disparity has slightly lessened over the past three years, from seventy cents per every one dollar a male counterpart earns to seventy-five cents per every one dollar, progress has been slow and the connection between power, money, and gender is still prominent within the sector. Responses to interviews conducted for the AAMD study suggest that, in most cases, “boards have historically felt more comfortable with male directors assuming risk, particularly for Encyclopedic museums, which most interviewees viewed as conservative, traditional, and risk-averse” (Treviño 13). In her article about the AAMD findings, writer Hilarie Sheets spoke with Elizabeth Easton, director of the Center for Curatorial Leadership about the gender disparities highlighted. Easton observed that “Everyone just claps their hands and says that it’s getting better. But with boards full of men and search committees gravitating to men, it’s not going to get better” (Sheets). Indeed, the shift must come at all levels; museum boards, hiring committees, and leadership must change culturally ingrained biases and assumptions about gender and leadership. Many of these same gender

disparities have been reflected in industry and location specific studies across the sector, most notably in a 2017 DataArts study of Los Angeles County and the Council on Foundations' "State of Change" study (Mills).

Gender bias and disparity is just a portion of the complex inequalities facing the creative sector but is certainly not the only example. In one of the most racially diverse cities in the nation, New York City, the racial divide between citizenry and cultural staffing is sobering. In response to a recent study conducted by the city, writer Robin Pogrebin observed that "while 67 percent of New York City residents identify as people of color, only 38 percent of employees at cultural organizations describe themselves that way." Furthermore, data shows that curatorial positions are still overwhelmingly held by white candidates, while the jobs with the least number of white employees were maintenance and security (Pogrebin). This highlights an extreme inequity and lack of diversity in the administrative and creative positions that have the greatest amount of cultural sector influence. New York City is not alone in this diversity and equity crisis. A recent DataArts study of Los Angeles County showed the same racial disparity: "as much as 60% of arts and culture workers identify as White non-Hispanic versus a county population that reports as 27% White" ("Demographics").

It is also worth acknowledging the less consistently studied but equally problematic issues of representation of LGBTQ-identifying arts and culture workers and workers with visible and non-visible disabilities. While large scale, industry-wide reports like the 2017 Council on Foundations study "State of Change" captured meaningful data on the racial and gender makeups of staff, they struggled with privacy and disclosure issues related to LGBTQ identities and disability. On requesting data on employees with

disability, “We saw significant under-reporting that limited our ability to draw meaningful conclusions from the data...similarly, requesting data on the sexual orientation and gender identity of staff has raised some privacy concerns” (Mills 11). This gap is not surprising when we consider the gender binary expectation inherently established when creating a study meant to track male to female pay and employment gaps. More work needs to be done to create more inclusive measurement structures for arts organizations.

Conversely, some studies have found meaningful information on LGBTQ identifying staff and on staff who report having a disability. In the DataArts report, there were some heartening findings showing that both groups were well represented within LA County arts organizations compared to the overall populations. However, this same study also acknowledged that historical data on these groups was spotty at best as “census does not collect this information and there is wide disparity of practice and policy related to tracking this information across employers, states, and municipalities” (“Demographics” 36). It is also important to note that LA County is a very liberal and, for the most part, an LGBTQ friendly work environment. This is not always the case with every community and LGBTQ employees are still amongst the most vulnerable legally and socially.

The issue of LGBTQ representation is one of workforce and visibility. In a report on the recent GLAAD Studio Responsibility Index, it was noted that “Major film studios broadly fell short last year of increasing the number of characters in their movies that are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer” (Lopez). This index report looks at representation in the whole character and plot of a film, not simply that an LGBTQ

individual is present. “Too often...LGBTQ characters appear only briefly in films or in service of a joke...only nine passed the report’s Vito Russo test, a measurement that examines how well-rounded and integral the character is in the film” (Lopez). These issues and index findings on how the arts sector defines representation highlights current vulnerabilities in our industry’s own data reporting.

This data, reflective of trends across the sector, is disheartening when we consider the sweeping public efforts and communications around advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives within the arts. Arts organizations’ responses to these numbers have moved beyond public statements to include additional, issue-targeted programs and reports. Reports have been produced, new programs have been initiated, and diversity-centered hiring practices have been championed by arts leaders in response to this industry-wide need. In the 2017 report produced by the Council on Foundations, one proposed solution to the staff disparity was to change how organizations hire and build talent. “Leaders must see genius beyond those who remind them of themselves if we are to diversify the pool of future philanthropic leaders” (Mills 28). This is one idea amongst thousands, all deserving of equal consideration, but it is representative of the massive culture change facing the arts sector. This idea of shifting the sector’s perception of genius, of changing our collective ideas of what is good leadership and who will make good leaders, is a transformation of our collective culture. This challenges the unconscious biases that inform our industry and society. It is a commitment to change the seemingly invisible barriers that create systemic, institutional oppression. However, changing something that, by definition, is interwoven into our very culture and invisible to those who benefit from it is impossible without willingly and aggressively addressing

who benefits and how. If an organization sincerely wishes to address such issues, it will take more than a desire to be diverse, it will require opening the door to self-reflection, challenging accepted power structures and dynamics, and allowing for those within the structure to safely voice dissent and engage in conflict-positive communication.

Chapter II

CREATING BETTER ARTS ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

“...diverse cities are more productive, diverse boards of directors make better decisions, the most innovative companies are diverse.” - Scott E. Page

The arts and culture sector has well-founded cause for its motivation to become more equitable and inclusive in its internal staffing and operations. Evidence shows that diversity and equity in internal staffing is beneficial to both the sector as a whole and to arts organizations individually. Implementing initiatives to improve and prioritize issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion can lead to improved community engagement, greater innovation, increased productivity, and better decision making. It is undeniable that arts administrators and organization leaders across the sector should be prioritizing these areas if they hope to remain relevant in a rapidly changing creative environment.

It has become a widely accepted truth that arts organizations seeking to create deeper and more meaningful connections with an increasingly diversified audience or community, must also reflect that inclusivity and diversity internally. An example of this growing commitment can be seen in government agencies. In the recent development and publication of New York City’s Cultural Plan, the city outlined diversity and inclusion as a priority area of concern. During the research phase of the cultural plan, the city found that “the staff and leadership of the city’s arts and cultural sector should more fully reflect the diversity of our city’s population,” that citizens and the government want to

ensure that all of NYC's diverse communities "are reflected at all levels of the city's cultural organizations—now and into the future" ("The Plan: Summary"). Reinforcing this commitment, Mayor Bill De Blasio stated during a press conference in Queens, NY, that the city will collect data on the makeup of the staffs and boards and require these arts organizations to submit "meaningful goals" for making their ranks more diverse. This data will be tied to future funding for arts organizations across the city (Boucher). Other government agencies have also begun more meticulously requesting information on institutional staffing and board demographics.

This sentiment is also reflected in the recent work and hiring practices of private arts funding organizations. In connection with recent public statements on how Ford Foundation seeks to address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, the foundation has gone so far as to publicly share statistical data on the makeup of the board, staff, and leadership in terms of both gender and race. Although this data shows opportunities for improvement, the public accountability and sharing of action steps are a refreshing insight into their commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion at all levels of operation. The actions and vision of the Ford Foundation is important in how it can inform arts funding trends and opportunities. Ford Foundation, according to 2012 data aggregated by the Foundation Center, represents the third largest arts and culture funder globally, having granted \$56,144,511 in 2012 alone. ("Foundation Stats") It is clear that the Ford Foundation believes its internal commitment to these values is integral to the external implementation of those values through Ford's programming. "We believe every person's voice adds value, and we strive to create balance in the face of power differences. We believe that no one person can or should be called upon to represent an

entire community” (“Diversity”). In addition to internal change, Ford Foundation, like many funders, is making these equity, diversity, and inclusion principles known through programming. In November 2017, Ford Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation announced a joint funding initiative that promises grants totaling \$6 million for activities that work to diversify museum curatorial and management staff across the US. This funding program targets museum hiring and career development initiatives, “with the goal of shaping curatorial, programmatic, and managerial decisions that lead to long-term benefits for individual museums and the field as a whole” (“Ford”). The actions of Ford Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation are reflective of a sweeping trend amongst funders of all types, nationally and locally focused—a trend that has influenced arts organizations across the sector to alter their own commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

In her 2015 paper, “Change For The Better: Decision-making, Cognitive And Identity Diversity, And Strong Arts Organization Performance,” researcher and arts administrator Deirdra Montgomery demonstrated that “The demographic make-up of cultural institutions has not evolved to reflect the increasingly diverse communities those organizations intend to serve, hindering the appeal and effectiveness of those institutions” (Montgomery 1). She connects declining attendance numbers, loss of revenue, and shifting demographics of donor populations to the obvious “homogeneity” problem within the arts administration sector (Montgomery 2-6). A sentiment echoed by Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation, when approached by the *New York Times* for a comment on why arts institutions were making these changes: “arts groups are becoming

more proactive not just because of political pressure, but because of economic necessity” (Pogrebin).

Diversity in organizations working to solve problems has even greater positive impact when the problem directly correlates to issues of equity, diversity, or inclusion. Organizations seeking to reach new or more diverse communities will likely find that internal “contributions by people whose perspectives diverge from those already involved in the conversation may illuminate some solutions that may not have been considered previously” (Montgomery 23). This is not to say that only organizations wishing to serve specific groups or demographics should hire individuals reflective of those groups, but rather, that organizations seeking to create more equitable, diverse, and inclusive internal structures should create opportunities for voices representing all identities and groups to work collaboratively and effectively to address existing systemic barriers.

The benefits of team and staff diversity within arts organizations also go beyond community engagement and representation. In a 2014 article for *Scientific American*, professor and researcher Katherine W. Phillips makes plain the evidence, across industries, that diversity drives innovation. “Diversity enhances creativity... encourages the search for novel information and perspectives...and (can) lead to unfettered discoveries and breakthrough innovations” (Phillips). The evidence comes from a wide range of sectors and organizational types. It shows that diversity increases an organization’s or group’s access to new information and provokes better cognitive thinking (Phillips). This idea of the value of diversity of thought is well established amongst Phillips’ peers. Researcher and professor of complex systems, political science, and economics, Scott E. Page readily admits that his work focuses on diversity of

experience and thought, not specifically gender, identity, race, or other social and cultural distinctions. However, he asserts that these attributes do impact diversity of thought and should not be discounted. “There’s certainly a lot of evidence that people’s identity groups — ethnic, racial, sexual, age — matter when it comes to diversity in thinking” (Dreifus). It is this diversity that Page and Phillips rightly argue will lead to more innovative thinking.

The argument in support of more diverse and inclusive arts organizations is also about productivity. In a 2008 *New York Times* interview with Scott E. Page, writer Claudia Dreifus delves into Page’s research on organizational productivity. In his work, Page posits that the answer to creating more productive organizations is “messy, creative organizations and environments with individuals from vastly different backgrounds and life experiences” (Dreifus). Phillips’ research also highlights the benefits brought by more diverse teams as it relates to motivation. “Individuals working within groups where a difference of opinion and perspective is a given will assume the need to work harder in diverse environments both cognitively and socially” to come to an agreed decision (Phillips). Although this additional work might be somewhat inconvenient for those who would rather choose the easier decision-making path, it is well worth the effort for arts organizations that seek to spark innovation and make better decisions.

Connected to improved productivity and innovation, diversity on teams also supports better decision making, especially on creative and critical organizational issues. Page illustrates this point by expounding on the addition of women to the field of economics in the 1970s. “When you only had men thinking about the economy, they were ignoring the productivity of half the population. By including the perspectives of

females, the estimates got more accurate. This was important...for understanding contemporary societies” (Dreifus). Katherine Phillips reinforces these findings through her own research, showing that the benefits and logic of informational diversity also applies to social diversity. “People who are different from one another in race, gender and other dimensions bring unique information and experiences to bear on the task at hand” (Phillips).

Deidra Montgomery, once again, provides a valuable analysis of cross-industry research on the value of diversity in group decision making. Montgomery shows that the connection between homogeneity of groups and poorer decision making in business should resonate with arts organizations struggling with a lack of diversity or inclusion in their staffing. “Members of a group must demonstrate cognitive diversity—they must have different problem-solving tools—and avoid a tendency towards reaching immediate consensus” (Montgomery 18). Citing authors and researchers like Scott E. Page, Montgomery demonstrates that “each person possesses a ‘cognitive toolbox’ in which he or she carries four formal frameworks: perspectives, interpretations, heuristics, and predictive models” (Montgomery 19) and that these differing perspectives are integral to better organizational decision making.

The evidence supporting why arts organizations should want more diverse, equitable, and inclusive internal structures is overwhelming. The benefits are both external and internal, resulting in improved community engagement, greater innovation, increased productivity, and better team decision making. Arts organizations must identify and implement ways to diversify their organizations, but, equally important, arts organizations must also find ways to engage internal stakeholders in needed conflict-

positive dialogue about the recognized and invisible barriers to equity, diversity, and inclusion that currently exist. As arts administrators actively seek to bring more people into the conversation, they must create space for those people to voice opposition and suggest controversial new ideas for change. As Montgomery observed, to make better decisions and implement positive change arts organizations must recognize and value that each person comes with a unique “cognitive toolbox,” and remove any restriction on an employee’s ability to voice dissent.

Chapter III

THE VALUES AND RISKS OF A CONFLICT-POSITIVE ORGANIZATION

“Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground” - Frederick Douglass

Managers and leaders across industries and within all types of organizations have long accepted internal conflict as a common element of any business. Any cursory online or library search will return a multitude of scholarly, anecdotal, or instructional texts on how to manage for or prevent harmful conflict within organizations. In 2008, behavioral scientist and professor of psychology Carsten De Dreu wrote that “conflict and organizations belong together, and within organizations conflict can have a multitude of valuable and dysfunctional consequences” (De Dreu 14). De Dreu’s writings were a reflection of the rumblings within his circle of behavioral psychology peers that conflict within organizations could have positive value; conflict could be beneficial for the individuals within an organization and for the organization as a whole. However, what was viewed as a new and exciting avenue of research for behavioral psychologists, has long been a foundational part of social justice and community organizing principals. Such ideologies and practices have valued conflict as a positive force for building dialogue, addressing systemic power structures, and implementing meaningful change. Whether it is the words of Frederick Douglass in 1849, espousing the need for conflict in order to move equality forward, or contemporary social justice resource books outlining how

organizations can implement meaningful social change, the work of community organizers, activists, and social justice change-leaders have long utilized conflict-positive approaches.

Building on this legacy of work, in 1997, educators, activists, and organizers Kenneth Jones, Jeanne Gauna, Karimah Nonyameko, and Tema Okun founded ChangeWork, later changed to Dismantling Racism Works, dedicated to helping organizations of all types identify and address systemic and institutional racism. Although the group has stopped offering direct workshops and consulting services, the legacy of workbooks and toolsets are still widely available and utilized by like-minded social change groups and organizations. These tool sets were developed collaboratively with the ChangeWork team and represent an amalgamation of the shared advocacy and social change-work done by individuals and social change organizations like the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. One of these toolsets, Okun's article *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, highlights some of the subtle or overlooked organizational qualities that indicate an oppressive or white supremacist culture. Many of these qualities are so ingrained in the status quo that we no longer question their relevance. Okun identifies anti-conflict attitudes as a quality of white supremacist internal culture: "people in power are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore it or run from it" (Okun 5). If arts organizations seek to implement meaningful internal change in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion, then those organizations must also consider how conflict can impact internal culture.

Conflict for Better Organizations

The first challenge in identifying positive conflict and establishing whether an arts organization can be conflict-positive is distinguishing between positive and negative outcomes of conflict. From the 1980s to early 2000s, behavioral psychologists became increasingly interested in the role conflict played in organizational dynamics, both interpersonally and within team decision making. In the “Special Issue on Positive Conflict -- Conflict and Employees: The Right and Processes to Be Heard” of the *Employee Responsibilities & Rights Journal*, leaders from various business and behavioral psychology sectors posited on data and studies in support of conflict as a positive force within groups, businesses, and organizations. In the introduction to this special issue, Dan Dalton and Richard Cosier write that, although the spectrum of types of conflict is broad, conceptual and empirical evidence shows “that conflict can be a positive force in the modern organization” (Dalton and Cosier 3). This special issue, the articles within it, and articles like it, represent a foundation for research and scholarly inquiry into the matter of the conflict-positive organization.

In an evaluation of research and various empirical studies focused specifically on strategic decision making within organizations, psychologists observed patterns in which cognitive conflict, the “incompatible views and interpretations between people,” can counteract the negative implications of groupthink, like when a group’s desire for harmony acts in detriment to the group’s ability to fully analyze issues or decisions, preventing critical thinking and better decision making (Cosier et al. 7). Additional

studies on strategic decision making cited in Cosier, Dalton, and Taylor's writings supported this pattern, finding that internal consensus within organizations often resulted in lower performance, while "open discussion of issues incorporating conflicting points of view was apparent in successful companies" (Cosier et al. 8). One of the more prevalent voices in management research supporting the positive value of conflict within organizations is Dean Tjosvold, Emeritus Professor of Management at Lingnan University and author of over 200 articles and 20 books on the subjects of cooperation and competition, managing conflict, and leadership and power in organizations ("Selected Works of Prof. Tjosvold"). In his book *The Conflict Positive Organization*, Tjosvold posits that "Conflict is the medium by which problems are recognized and solved," and that conflict is necessary within organizations seeking to solve problems that require diverse opinions and information (Tjosvold, *Conflict-Positive Organization* 2). More on Tjosvold's argument for how conflict elevates social justice and employee-voice within organizations as well as information on structuring a conflict-positive organization will be provided later within this paper, but his central argument is that "positive conflict should be the dominant, not the only, approach to managing conflict" (Tjosvold, *Conflict-Positive Organization* 9). Despite his strong support for the conflict-positive organization, Tjosvold argues that organizations should be prepared to react to the full spectrum of outcomes possible when dealing with conflict. Positive conflict can be a valuable tool, but it does not negate the need to manage negative or non-constructive conflict.

Likewise, in their longitudinal study of intragroup conflict and its impact on group performance, Karen Jehn and Elizabeth Mannix identified three key types of

conflict: interpersonal conflict, process conflict, and task conflict. They then sought to more deeply understand how these different conflict types impact group performance. It should be noted, that across the spectrum of scholarly texts on the subject, the terms cognitive conflict and task conflict were often used interchangeably. For their purposes, Jehn and Mannix define task conflict as “similar to cognitive conflict, it pertains to conflict about ideas and differences of opinion about the task,” and interpersonal or relationship conflict as “personal issues such as a dislike among group members,” and feelings of annoyance or irritation (Jehn and Mannix 238). These definitions mimic the ones used to describe affective, related to moods and emotions, and cognitive, related to mental processing or understanding, conflict in alternate studies. The third term identified in this study, process conflict, exists when “group members disagree about whose responsibility it is to complete a specific duty” (Jehn and Mannix 239). They posit, based on their own study and similar research referenced in the article, that “task debates are necessary for high-quality ideas.” The study specifically found that “low-performing groups, by contrast, actually experienced a dip in task conflict... the same low-performing groups also exhibited this escalating pattern for relationship conflict” (Jehn and Mannix 247). This distinction is important as it highlights the duality of conflict within working groups. It suggests that, although task conflict is needed for better decision making and that low-performing groups will likely have a dearth of task conflict, other types of conflict, in this case relationship conflict, can have a negative impact when present within organizations. Jehn and Mannix go on to clarify that, throughout the study, task conflict was the only conflict type found at higher frequency in high-performing working groups, and rates of relationship conflict were lower within high-performing

groups (Jehn and Mannix 247). These and additional results from their study indicate “that to develop high-performing groups, managers must encourage open discussion norms, high levels of respect among members, and a cohesive and supportive team environment...our findings suggest that teams will be more successful to the extent that their leaders can promote constructive debate concerning the task at hand” (Jehn and Mannix 248). Although conflict in general is not universally positive within organizations, if harnessed by leadership as a necessary part of accomplishing specific goals and with strategies in place to reduce negative interpersonal conflicts and support trust, conflict can be beneficial.

Researchers in the behavioral sciences and other like-minded fields also took up the mantle of study on conflict in group or team settings. In their 2009 “Longitudinal Study of Team Conflict, Conflict Management, Cohesion, and Team Effectiveness,” Amanuel G. Tekleab, Narda R. Quigley, and Paul E. Tesluk argue that group cohesion and individual-voice are core elements for understanding the nuances of interpersonal conflict and its negative impact on the potential positives of task based or cognitive conflict. They found that “with higher levels of task conflict, team members have an increased opportunity to voice their own perspective on issues...that team members who use voice opportunities are more willing to accept group decisions” (Tekleab et al. 176). In this way, conflict and an employee’s ability to engage constructively with conflicts of opinion leads to better team cohesion.

In their 2014 study of workgroup dynamics, Torodova, Bear, and Weingart further distill the ways in which conflict can create positive feelings amongst an organization's team members. Although their study specifically focused on a broad field

study of healthcare workers, the results are still relevant to the ways in which any team within an organization might benefit from conflict. The study tested a theoretical model about how task conflict can engender positive emotions and enhance job satisfaction. These “findings indicate that task conflict can be energizing but that conflict intensity and context matter” (Torodova et al. 461). This study also brings to light an important argument that scholars had not adequately addressed previously: positive and negative outcomes or reactions to conflict are not mutually exclusive. A negative emotional reaction to conflict does not necessarily indicate that there will be a lack of positive outcomes. There is a strong likelihood that, although an immediate emotional reaction might be stressful or uncomfortable, this can occur at the same time as positive outcomes, such as greater job satisfaction and energized team members (Todorova et al. 461-463). Torodova, Bear, and Weingart found that organizations and leaders who utilize conflict as an internal communication tool and foster expression of differing viewpoints in an active learning context will also generate a positive energizing effect for employees. Their evidence suggests that “conflict expressions between people who have different job functions produce useful and novel information and thus energize employees” (Todorova et al. 463). This is notable in that it speaks to the positive value of conflict as a means of expanding knowledge, enhancing decision making, and elevating employee satisfaction, an amalgamation of many of the arguments posed by earlier researchers.

This is not to say that conflict will always yield positive outcomes. Conflict, when not properly addressed or when overtly personal in nature, can be highly problematic for arts organizations. Human resources and business leaders regularly write about the need to stop personal conflict and distinguish it from positive and constructive conflict.

Managers should “set up the expectation that personal attacks are not tolerated whereas healthy debate about ideas and options is encouraged” (Heathfield, “How to Encourage”). It is also important to point out that conflict can be used as a means of oppression against those who are most at risk or vulnerable within a group, especially when that conflict is personal in nature. In a recent article for *Psychology Today*, it was noted that workplace bullying towards LGBTQ employees is still quite common, close to 40% report “feeling bullied at work, 11 percentage points higher than the national average of all workers combined...fifty-six percent of bullied LGBT workers report being bullied repeatedly” (Scheff). It is easy to see how unchecked personal conflict could easily lead to targeted bullying of vulnerable or marginalized individuals. In these instances, managers and leadership should stand ready to intervene and reinforce what types of conflict are and are not considered acceptable.

Although not specifically connected to the role of conflict within diversity initiatives, researchers use the term cognitive conflict to identify conflict that seeks to challenge ideas and the status quo of a group, system, or organization. In these cases, personal positions are called into question, which “could easily result in some managers feeling threatened by cognitive conflict and cause them to squelch dissent and the opportunity to speak one's mind” (Cosier et al. 9). Researcher Robert A. Baron expands on the perceived negative effects of conflict and where those perceptions arise noting that “for many persons, the word [conflict] has a strongly negative connotation” (Baron 1). This perception of negative outcomes can often lead organizations and individuals to shy away or actively work to avoid conflict of all types.

Much of conflict's negative implications are tied to established systemic power structures and our own fears, perceptions and assumptions about conflict and dissent. To counter this fear, Cosier, Dalton, and Lewis observed in their research that when issues are critical, the benefits of that conflict far outweigh the potential for hard feelings. Allowing employees the power to voice dissent, suggest improvements, whistle-blow, or engage in other issue-critical means of conflict is necessary. They wrote that cognitive conflict and employee voice is "defined mostly as criticism of one's work organization" (Cosier et al. 9). This definition of cognitive conflict is important in its distinction from more common fears about personal conflict or personal disputes between employees. Cognitive conflict as defined here is integral to organizations. It both fulfills a need for a sense of equity and justice within the group and enables that group to make better decisions using positive conflict.

Conflict in Support of Social Change

Research on the value and consequences of conflict extends well beyond the realm of psychology and organizational management theory. In their 2012 article "Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change," communication theory specialists and researchers Ganesh and Zoller distill several decades worth of research, case studies, and scholarly writings on the intersections of communication theory and activism. Their analysis of these varying perspectives compares the ways in which different organizations and activist groups utilize conflict to advance specific advocacy goals. Although these approaches are broad and a full study of the individual merits of each communication theory will not be addressed in this paper, it is important to note that

“across perspectives and disciplines, however, one finds an emphasis, on contestation as a core aspect of activist communication, and key concepts such as advocacy, conflict, and transgression do appear to be central to activism” (Ganesh and Zoller 69). Specifically, Ganesh and Zoller highlight the ways in which the agonistic perspective in communication theory elevates conflict as a needed element for implementing social change, allowing for openness and the sharing of ideas even if those ideas pose a challenge within the organization itself. They argue that case studies and research on this communication theory show that in many cases “the very act of challenging dominant systems of power and meaning through argumentative, confrontational, or irrational tactics opens up alternative spaces” (Ganesh and Zoller 78). In the summary of their findings, Ganesh and Zoller expand on this idea of the agonistic perspective and the importance of moving away from the assumption that dialogue is purely collaborative. Research strongly suggests that effective and open dialogue must involve conflict and that we should “treat tension as inevitable throughout the process instead of either escalatory or abnormal” (Ganesh and Zoller 85-86). Building on the organizational studies outlined earlier, we can begin to see the threads that tie positive conflict to social change initiatives by challenging systemic power structures and improving communication between individuals and groups.

For generations, the work of social justice and community organizers has heavily supported conflict when engaging in any attempt at social change. Reflecting on the legacy of Civil Rights activists and organizers, conflict is a necessary part of recognizing oppressive systems and bias. In his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about the pleas from supposed allies or liberal

communities that activists not “create hostility” in their communities. “They failed to realize that the hatred and the hostilities were already latently or subconsciously present. Our marches merely brought them to the surface...only through this kind of exposure will the cancer ever be cured” (King 96). This need for expecting and embracing conflict as part of the solution is echoed in contemporary social justice work. The fear of and suppression of conflict is listed as an indicator of white supremacist culture by organizer and social justice activist Tema Okun. If an organization’s culture and leadership structure foster an environment where “those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes” (Okun 5), then it is not surprising that suggestions or feedback about power dynamics and the connection to systemic oppression might be interpreted as unwanted or feared conflict. Additionally, when interviewed for this paper, the Executive Director of ArtEquity and community organizer, Carmen Morgan, stated, “it's not necessarily a new position, every step towards justice involved conflict...it's a given” (C. Morgan). She then dissects the role conflict plays even further, as a continuum ranging from conflict avoidance for those who don’t want to “rock the boat” and conflict as a necessity in an individual’s existence, “for people...who don't have the power advantage, who aren't a part of the mainstream, who are needing to assert themselves for their humanity, conflict is a natural part of life.” Even the luxury of choosing to avoid or suppress conflict, as Morgan points out, is a position of privilege and power that is not afforded to everyone equally. Additionally, “conflict is seen as an invitation for change as opposed to something to be feared” (C. Morgan). Arts organizations seeking to implement an equity-, diversity-, or inclusion-centered change initiative, must expect and embrace conflict as part of that work.

Community organizers and social justice activists have been building on a strong legacy of change-work that embraces and expects conflict as part of elevating oppressed voices and scrutinizing the oppressors, leading to meaningful dialogue and change. This connection between social justice and an individual's voice also resonates within organizational structures. Drawing from his own extensive research on the concept of the conflict-positive organization and the role conflict plays within organizational change, Tjosvold observed that the benefits of positive conflict or, in his terms "cooperative conflict," go beyond better decision making; it also supports an individual's sense of self-expression. Dissent is a valued right for individuals and giving space for dissent within organizations can have positive outcomes. "Through conflict, problems are identified, and solutions created and accepted, and a sense of justice and fairness established" (Tjosvold, "Rights" 13). If any organization, art or otherwise, seeks to identify and develop solutions for internal problems like equity, diversity, and inclusion with justice and fairness in mind, being conflict-positive will be part of that dialogue and implementation process.

In his comprehensive work, *Diversity and Complexity*, Page provided a broad, evidence-based overview of the ways in which diversity impacts complex systems, groups, and organizations. Although much of the book centers on his argument that diversity in complex systems is essential for innovation, good decision-making, and sustainability, Page also cautions in the "Parting Thoughts" chapter that, "even if in the aggregate, synergies created by diverse types create a larger pie, the split of that pie must be equitable for all those diverse parts to want to remain" (Page 250). In this way, if arts administrators work to bring a diversity of backgrounds, ethnicities, identities, genders,

and ideologies to the table, keeping those individuals engaged in the conversation will require equitable idea sharing, collaboration, and the fostering of positive conflict.

The need to utilize positive conflict to address issues of social justice and equity within the workforce is not new. There is a strong history and evidence of the value of conflict within social change and social justice advocacy work. The fields of behavioral psychology, organizational management theory, and communication theory have a diverse set of findings that prove the value of conflict within organizations. Evidence also shows that when not given the opportunity to voice dissent and broach conflict-heavy discussions about the workplace, employees will assert “their rights through legal action, grievance procedures, whistle-blowing, and informal threats to leave the organization” (Tjosvold, “Rights” 14). While it was previously shown that some forms of personal conflict have the potential to be oppressive, arts organizations that wish to implement meaningful equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives must encourage and embrace conflict that seeks to highlight injustice, inequity, and the unseen biases that create systemic and institutionalized oppression.

Chapter IV

IMPLEMENTING A CONFLICT-POSITIVE APPROACH WITHIN ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

“The idea of positive conflict is just beginning to reshape management thinking...it challenges traditional assumptions that effective designs minimize conflict.” Tjosvold

It is tempting to assume that arts organizations seeking to incorporate a conflict-positive internal culture and leadership structure simply need to commit to this idea, and that intentionality is the leading factor in an organizational shift. This assumption is misguided. An Executive Director, for example, announcing at an all-staff meeting that an organization now welcomes dissent and conflict as a way of identifying its own bias and systemic failings, does not inherently lead to a change in the cultural status quo or address the power dynamics that prevent open dialogue. In the same ways that intention to embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion within arts institutions is not enough, meaningful changes in an organization’s approach to conflict is an ongoing process, not a one-time shift. This chapter will dissect the ways in which the arts industry is not currently embracing conflict-positive internal cultures and structures, why arts organizations are well suited for this type of culture, and some of the ways that conflict-positive leadership and internal culture can be implemented across arts organizational types.

Current Internal Structures: The Traditional and New

A quick look at most arts organizations' staff lists will likely reveal a traditional hierarchical leadership structure comprised of strata of executives, directors, managers, officers, associates, and assistants. In her 2016 paper on the topic of organizational structures, administrator and researcher Jordan Roeder rightly observed that the cultural nonprofit sector overwhelmingly favors the same hierarchical structures established by the business sector in the 1950s. This preference isn't necessarily surprising. "It makes some sense that organizations would seek out a structure that is seen as logical and is familiar to politicians and those outside the field, though it may cost them in their ability to innovate and experiment" (Roeder 18). This sentiment carries over for donors, board members, and community partners, many of whom come from sectors that strongly embrace traditional hierarchical structures in which decision-making power and innovation trickles down from the top. In these structures the Executive Director or CEO of an organization is the guiding force and lead power-holder.

Hierarchical structures can have benefits such as providing various levels of accountability and a straightforward decision-making power structure. However, this concentrated decision-making structure, as Roeder aptly points out, can result in "organizations that are unable to adapt and innovate" (3) due to the pitfalls of strict hierarchical internal communication. Although not inherently bad, hierarchical communication can become cumbersome or siloed, resulting in poor communication across the strata of the organization. "Additionally, employees who are not able to be part of key decision-making processes often feel disengaged or ineffective" (Roeder 3). This

echoes the same research outlined earlier in this paper showing that diverse groups with the ability to harness and communicate conflict positively are more likely to make better and more efficient decisions and feel a sense of connectivity and empowerment.

In writing about prominent indicators for a white supremacy culture within organizations, Okun highlights the risks of a Paternalism and Power Hoarding organizational culture. Although Okun seeks to specifically address the issue of white supremacist culture, these organizational qualities can also speak to systems of oppression that work against individuals and groups of varying identities, orientations, and abilities. Paternalism describes an organization in which the hierarchy of decision making is strict and segmented to the detriment of all. Organizations with a Paternalism culture are ones where “those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power, those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions, those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does” (Okun 5). Power Hoarding is also listed as an identifiable quality for white supremacist cultures. Power Hoarding occurs in organizations where power is treated as a limited resource, designated for only the top few and where threats to power or suggestions to share power are perceived as personal attacks or negative reflections on an individual's leadership. Okun also points out that, in Power Hoarding organizations, this trait is rarely visible to those in power. “Those with power assume they have the best interests of the organization at heart and assume those wanting change are ill-informed (stupid), emotional, inexperienced” (Okun 5). In both cases, Paternalism and Power

Hoarding are features that can easily describe the way hierarchical structures traditionally function.

Arts organizations seeking to reconsider structural norms in support of conflict-positive principals might want to pursue a thorough investigation of non-hierarchical models. One example of a staffing structure alternative to hierarchical models is the flat organization. Flat organizations, which have few hierarchical staffing levels and few or no managers, function on the premise of team or groups-based management (Roeder). Hierarchy might still exist, flat organizations can still employ CEOs or Director level leadership, but management-level leadership is diminished in favor of self-management or group management. It is becoming more common to see more flat structures amongst newer organizations, collectives, or member-driven groups. Indeed, Roeder points to smaller and new theater companies as an excellent example of a flat structure at work. Acting as “an ensemble, with company members all taking on both administrative and creative tasks as a team...has allowed for very low overhead costs, fast communication, and the ability for all members to have input on decisions” (Roeder 53).

Fractured Atlas, an interesting and compelling example of a structural transition in support of better internal decision-making and based on a conflict-positive approach to leadership, recently announced its own transition to a flattened leadership structure. Like most arts organizations, primary leadership was in the form of CEO Adam Huttler, who stepped down from this role in November 2017 to become CEO of the organization’s new but separate investment enterprise. The board voted to empower a new four-person leadership committee “that reflects our ongoing commitment to advancing equity and equitable decision-making” (“Launching Exponential Creativity”). What is especially

notable about this change in Fractured Atlas' leadership is that the flat-structure is at the highest level. "The newly restructured management team includes Shawn Anderson, Chief Technology Officer; Tim Cynova, Chief Operating Officer; Lauren Ruffin, Chief External Relations Officer; and Pallavi Sharma, Chief Program Officer" ("Launching Exponential Creativity"). This is truly a flat-structure where the four decisionmakers have equal voice and accountability in the execution of the organization's priorities and vision.

Another alternative model currently used, although not frequently, is the holacracy model, an extreme commitment to shared power in which "employees function within circles; decision-making power is distributed to all members" (Roeder 32). The member-focused and participatory democracy centered arts organization Alternate ROOTS is a good example of a successful holacracy model. Membership is open to any interested artists or arts organizers within the geographic region that are interested in applying. "Voting members assume trusteeship for the organization and play a role in governing the organization" ("About Membership") and Alternate ROOTS goes to great lengths to ensure this process of membership is easily understood and accessible online.

Arts organizations like Fractured Atlas and Alternate ROOTS represent effective alternate structural models in the interest of developing better power sharing and stronger collaborative dialogue across all levels of the organization. However, this is not to say that alternative structures are the sole or even the primary solution to creating a conflict-positive organization that works in support of internal equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Arts organizations must consider the ways in which all internal processes and management strategies impact and build off of one another.

Human Resources, Management, and Internal Processes

In many ways, traditional human resources processes, better known as HR, are connected to the rigid communication and staffing structures of hierarchical organizations and can have a profound but often unseen impact on an organization's approach to conflict. In the traditional HR approach, legal compliance, conflict avoidance, and basic financial or payroll administration takes priority. Although not all arts organizations are large enough to warrant or afford an independent HR department or staff person, the ways in which an organization prioritizes and manages internal human resources does have a direct impact on internal conflict management, especially as it relates to healthy conflict in the service of social justice and equity. In a 2017 blog post, Tim Cynova of Fractured Atlas posted a comprehensive list of HR resources for organizations of all sizes and types, acknowledging that most in the arts sector become "accidental" HR professionals due to job changes and tight budgets (Cynova, "101 HR Thought Leaders"). Susan Heathfield, human resources expert and writer for *The Balance*, notes that HR traditionally serves "as the systematizing, policing arm of executive management" (Heathfield). In this approach, HR serves the executives and is more often perceived as a roadblock or barrier for employees. "In many organizations the role of HR is to keep the company out of court... to keep the company from getting sued," opines *Forbes* contributor Liz Ryan, former Fortune 500 HR executive. This attitude of keeping organizations safe and preventing any cause for suit or concern has a profound impact on an organization's internal culture. Compounded by the strict hierarchical communication and staffing structures described above, it is not surprising that most arts organizations do

not actively foster conflict-positive internal cultures and dialogue amongst staff, and directly or indirectly limit an employee's power in confronting systemic and institutionalized structures of oppression.

Over the past few years a more human-centered approach to HR has begun to gain traction in organizations of all types. In his 2015 article for *HuffPost*, "Why Human Resources is Dead," author Jacob Morgan observed, "The idea of thinking of employees as capital assets is antiquated, but for many it's not enough to simply talk about how HR is changing and what the new role of HR is. Companies are dropping the term 'human resources' altogether and are shifting towards more 'people centric' terms." As he notes, the rise of departments, job titles, or policies for Strategic People Operations rather than Human Resources are quickly gaining traction across sectors. The goals of Strategic People Operations differ from the legal compliance and conflict-avoidance based priorities of traditionalist HR. "People Operations teams have a streamlined and unified approach to supporting employees across their life cycle at the organization... aligning themselves as strategic partners with the organization's leadership" (Duffy). Although changing a department's name is arguably superficial, the trend does connect to an overwhelming shift in HR practices. Cynova warns arts organizations of the risks when any arts administrator does not thoughtfully consider the implications of human resources or people operations. "We often use conventional wisdom to help us address HR issues when, in fact, that can be some of the worst advice. (Hire with your gut? Your gut has unconscious biases.)" (Cynova, "101 HR Thought Leaders"). Practices are beginning to reflect the dialogue building, diversity and equity prioritizing, and power shifting values taking hold of organizations across the US and abroad. HR-centered professional

organizations, training facilities, consultants, and management companies are beginning to reflect a People Operations ideology even if they still bear the Human Resources label.

It is also important to acknowledge the way power and decision making within an organization is informed by management style and communication structure. Roeder acknowledges and expands on this “inextricable” (58) link between internal structure and management style. While the majority of arts organization adhere to the more traditional hierarchical approaches to management that rely on a strict control over the delegation of tasks and approval of employee actions, there are other management theories that speak to a more open and potentially conflict-positive organizational structure and culture. In stakeholder theory, for example, management works to identify all stakeholder groups within a company, identify the needs, values, and roles of each group, and develop management strategies in accordance with those values. “Stakeholder theory seeks to redistribute benefits and decision-making power across the company” (Roeder 25). Alternately, contingency theory asserts that “the specific nature of an organization determines the structure of an organization” and that management styles and communications should adapt to fit the specific needs of the organization at all times (Roeder 25). These two management theories prioritize flexibility and cross-communication between teams without sacrificing individual voice. The intentional implementation of more collaborative and empowering strategies could counter some of the negative outcomes often associated with strict or hierarchical staffing and power structures and should be thoughtfully considered by arts organization leaders and managers, especially if those organizations seek to better address the many overlooked or invisible barriers to equity, diversity, and inclusion that may exist within their own walls.

External Uses of Conflict-Positive Strategies and Communications

Mirroring the structures and systems prevalent throughout the US corporate and financial ecosystem, arts organizations of all types and sizes overwhelmingly favor strictly hierarchical internal structures and approaches to HR that demure from conflict. However, this is not reflective of many arts organizations' external approach to conflict and communication. In many ways, arts organizations are already embracing a conflict-positive approach to external programming by courting "controversy" or "conflict" to make a statement or to further value priorities. For example, many arts organizations have begun holding public programs and forums for discussion in response to the recent #metoo movement. In December 2017, the Public Theater hosted a free and open town hall event in response to what the organization called a "watershed" moment for addressing the pervasive culture of sexual harassment and misconduct within the sector. In an announcement for the event, the Public Theater wrote, "we invite you to listen, share stories, and offer suggestions as we collectively chart our path forward" (Bowley). This invitation to share and suggest options for change is an open invitation for difficult and often conflict heavy conversations; these conversations are necessary for meaningful dialogue and change in support of an arts organization's equity, diversity, and inclusion values.

The Public Theater is no stranger to a conflict-positive approach to public programming. The organization has standing, open-forum programming that directly engages in community dialogue and creative expression related to political and social

issues (“Public Forum”). In the summer of 2017, the Public Theater became willingly enmeshed in a national controversy surrounding the company’s interpretations and presentation of *Julius Caesar* during the famed Shakespeare In The Park productions. The theater received unprecedented national attention, lost valuable corporate sponsorship, experienced protests, conservative media-driven boycotts, and an outpouring of both support and condemnation. In response to and in defense of the theater’s decision to develop a production of this type, Oskar Eustice stated, “we recognize that our interpretation of the play has provoked heated discussion; audiences, sponsors and supporters have expressed varying viewpoints and opinions. Such discussion is exactly the goal of our civically engaged theater; this discourse is the basis of a healthy democracy” (Paulson and Deb). The Public Theater was not alone in the staging of *Julius Caesar* in response to the 2017 political environment. *New York Times* writers Michael Paulson and Sopan Deb observed that across the country from Oregon to New York to Oklahoma, theaters of all sizes have been staging their own versions of the production “as a way to chew over politics, power, democracy and authoritarianism at a moment when a populist leader with a fondness for executive power has moved into the White House” (Paulson and Deb). However, the combination of graphic violence, a likeness to President Trump, and the prestige of the Shakespeare In The Park productions incited strong reactions on both ends of the political spectrum. This reaction and ensuing conflict within the broader American community was likely expected, if not desired, by the Public Theater and its creative director. As *Time* aptly stated, “if your job is to bring Elizabethan drama to masses of 21st century New Yorkers, a little scandal and titillation is your friend” (Drehle). This is not to say that all arts organizations have the financial

position or mission focus that would allow and warrant such an aggressive, conflict-courting approach to public programming. It does, however, highlight the many ways in which arts organizations have used conflict as a means of furthering dialogue and community engagement.

In addition to embracing the potential for conflict as an integral part of meaningful public discourse and publicly relevant programming, the process of creating art and the field of arts education have long utilized conflict as a valuable tool. Almost any art producing organization is familiar with the value of creative conflict. In the interest of developing better works of art, creators need to push back against each other's ideas. Conflict as a necessary part of arts education is present even at the highest levels of arts education expertise. As part of the online tool-set available to educators, the Kennedy Center writes about the specific role conflict plays in arts education, art creation, and supporting more engaged and empathetic students. Although the online worksheet on "Creative Conflict: Resolving and Avoiding Conflict in Group Art Projects" at first seems to indicate that conflict should be avoided, the practical advice provided by the Kennedy Center is much more conflict-positive in implementation. Immediately the Center acknowledges that "with grades at stake, artistic differences, and varying levels of commitment, conflicts between students are par for the course" (Sotto). Collaborating students often come from differing experiences, viewpoints, and priorities, and this leads to an environment ripe for potential conflict. The Center outlines various methods for discouraging highly personal conflict amongst students while directly encouraging creative and cognitive conflict. In this way a conflict-positive approach to arts education and art creation supports better group decision making, greater empathy

and understanding, and a broader creative representation of the entire group’s ideas. The worksheet ends with a call to action for educators: “teach students that voicing their opinions—as well as negotiation and compromise—are indispensable skills in the real world, whether in the field of the arts and humanities or the sphere of business and politics” (Sotto). This highlights what a conflict-positive approach in a creative or work environment should be: an opportunity to welcome difference, voice opinions, and move together towards a better solution.

As a sector, arts organizations are constantly changing and adapting to the environment within which they operate. At any given moment, arts organizations face change initiatives in the form of new leadership, staffing restructures, shifts in funding priorities, programmatic changes, and redesigns. In all of these cases, conflict can be a productive part of that change. The implementation of any internal equity, diversity, and inclusion initiative should represent a definitive change in policy and values for arts organizations that had previously not prioritized such ideologies. Navigating this type of change successfully, much like navigating conflict-courting programmatic initiatives or creative-conflict in artmaking, requires an intentional and thoughtful approach.

Being Conflict-Positive

A conflict-positive internal culture can be implemented within various types of arts organizations and administrative structures; however, the path forward will depend on the needs of the organization and may likely change over time. In order for organizational leaders to identify the best way to move forward, they should begin by first understanding what constitutes an internal structure and how this informs and

enforces the organization's internal culture. Undoubtedly a complex concept, at its core, internal culture is an amalgamation of the inner workings of an organization; it is complex and dynamic. It can be informed by staff's connection to the mission, leadership and management styles, power and reporting structure, communications, diversity, work environment, and more (CommonGood Careers). In many ways these elements and specifically the inner workings of arts organizations are directly connected to leadership and power structure. An organization's leadership structure can be split into its component staffing structures, management strategies, and communication structures. All of these components inform how power is or is not distributed throughout an organization, and all of these components impact an art organization's internal culture. Arts organizations must understand and carefully consider these interactions if they wish to successfully implement conflict-positive systems in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

Although not inherently bad, the strict power structure, top-down management styles, and communication systems that comprise hierarchical organizations can easily inhibit a conflict-positive environment. As highlighted earlier, hierarchical organizations are more likely to adhere to a very limited and traditionalist, anti-conflict approach to HR. Alternately, an arts organization seeking to implement a more conflict-positive structure and internal systems might consider some of the other structure models described earlier in this chapter. These newer models seek to elevate employee voice, cross-team communication, accountability, and power sharing. All of these positive outcomes can aid arts organizations in better identifying internal changes and opportunities in support of their equity, diversity, and inclusion goals by creating safe and

supportive environments for employees to challenge assumptions and address systemic barriers that leadership might not see. However, an intention to elevate these principals should not be mistaken for meaningful change. In the case of Fractured Atlas, intention was only one step. When interviewed on this transition period of the organization, Member Advisor, Courtney Harge, shared, “there was a sense that they were very proud about being able to say that they are an anti-racist, anti-oppression organization and its something to be proud of, but I asked Adam at the second day on my job, what does that mean?...what are you doing?” (Harge). Additionally, arts organizations can also consider changing their own internal staffing and leadership structures over time. In Fractured Atlas’ case the flattened leadership structure came years later, and the decision was a reflection of what the organization needed operationally and internally. In the end, all structures are still prone to many of the same power dynamics, management philosophies, and conflict avoidance pitfalls; arts organizations must fully consider the actions and changes they seek to implement and how different structures, systems, and strategies will work together in support of that change.

Much like staffing, an organization’s approach to HR practices can often support or hinder a conflict-positive internal culture. For example, for some organizations, HR exists for the protection of the company, but truly holistic HR would work to further the organization’s and the individual employee’s professional goals. When interviewed on the connection between his work in People Operations, equity, diversity, inclusion work, and being conflict-positive, Tim Cynova stated that Fractured Atlas had unequivocally found that “trust and healthy conflict are key...with our A-work which we use as shorthand for anti-racism, anti-oppression, anti-bias” (Cynova). This dedication to being

conflict-positive as part of the HR mentality reflects Dean Tjosvold's research on organizational issues versus individual needs. "Do the requirements for corporate action take precedence over the needs of individuals? Where do employee rights end and their responsibilities begin?... positive conflict asserts that the collective and individual goods move together" (Tjosvold, "Rights" 22). Arts organizations of any size, whether they have a dedicated HR staff member or not, can shift internal policies, add practices, and prioritize leadership training to reflect a people-centered approach to staff resource management. Building the trust, accountability, and engaged community dialogue needed to have meaningful, healthy, positive conflict in the service of equity requires that these same qualities are present throughout an employee's entire experience at an organization. It is not possible to be truly conflict-positive without regard for how organizational systems and functions, like Human Resources, impact an employee's work experience.

Reflective of the industry's creativity and variety, arts organizations can and should consider all options available for leadership structure and overall management strategy. Regardless of an arts organization's ideal combination of the two, there are some universally applicable tactics for implementing conflict-positive communication structures and internal cultures. Strategies for reframing organizations to be conflict-positive range from external resources like training and the involvement of an outside consultant to more internal and long-term strategies around directly managing conflict-positive dialogue and continued internal reflection both for individual leaders and for the organizations as a whole. It is also important to constantly return to the social justice and advocacy work that informs a stronger, collective understanding of the power dynamics and systems that might impede progress for equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

For many arts organizations, especially the more historically entrenched and homogeneously white, male-led organizations, bringing in an outside consultant is a necessary and valuable first step when embarking on an equity, diversity, or inclusion initiative. Organizations like ArtEquity (“Home”), Alternate ROOTS (“What Is ROOTS”), and The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (“Undoing Racism”), and more have developed comprehensive tool sets, consultation services, and ongoing training programming for organizations seeking to implement meaningful internal social change. The work of these groups and organizations is built on a strong legacy of social justice and community organizing work that employs the use of outside evaluation and mediation to help organizations work toward a shared understanding of their current organizational cultures and “to inform planning and organization-wide strategic thinking with an equity lens” (“Resources”). The practice of engaging consultants is an example of the planned or programmed conflict recommended by behavioral psychologists and organizational researchers. “The use of ‘outsider voice’ from those not directly employed by the organization may lead to positive conflict inside the organization...raise questions about organizational practices and procedures” (Cosier et al. 9). In many cases, these questions become the initial starting point for debate and conflict-positive dialogue and, as Kira Hudson Banks observed in her article for the *Harvard Business Review*, these outside consultants and training programs can also “help company leaders navigate these difficult discussions” (Banks).

Implementing a shift in organizational structure and internal culture to be conflict-positive is a long-term change initiative. It is important for organizational leaders to acknowledge that outside consultation or training services are only one part of their

responsibilities for implementing any change initiative, especially change initiatives centered on equity, diversity, and inclusion. When speaking of diversity initiatives, Kira Hudson Banks argues that “standalone trainings and one-off dialogues — though currently considered best practice — are too quickly forgotten...limiting a company’s ability to foster sustained workplace climate change” (Banks). This argument certainly applies to transitioning workplace cultures to be more conflict-positive. Arts organization leaders must work to both reframe conflict and then support new conflict-positive positions through repeated group communication. When discussing his experience with major culture shifts and organizational change initiatives, Tim Cynova of Fractured Atlas posited that this process is ongoing and managers at all levels should be ready to openly and repeatedly reinforce and restate these values and principals as many times as the staff needs (Cynova, Personal interview). Courtney Harge noted that Fractured Atlas’ leadership works to emphasize and demonstrate commitment to conflict-positive interactions through consistent modeling, especially modeling in the context of the recent week-long employee retreat, the All Hands Week (“Offices Will Be Closed”). “One of the other things that was really great about our All Hands event was seeing our leadership team...engaging in healthy conflicts...it was fun to watch the four of them be like, no I disagree...and kind of work it out in this space in...real time” (Harge).

Reframing conflict is an important part of addressing oppressive organizational cultures and in establishing conflict-positive models. Arts administrators should work to “distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues” and “[not] require those who raise hard issues to raise them in acceptable ways” (Okun 6). Organizational leadership and managers should ensure that, across all levels of their organizations, the desire to

avoid conflict is not used as a reason to not directly address issues brought up by individuals. Undoubtedly, as Banks points out, these discussions “have the potential to be tense, and getting defensive is the quickest way to halt progress... fear of being seen as ‘confrontational’ for either white or minority employees hinders open dialogue, conflict needs to be reframed as a solution-seeking act necessary to progress” (Banks).

When working to reframe conflict, leaders should also acknowledge and work to address the ways in which conflict does not impact all employees equally. For some, engaging in a conflict-positive dialogue or openly participating in equity, diversity, and inclusion conversations can pose greater risk. For example, when discussing the organizational anti-oppression work at Fractured Atlas and the establishment of caucuses to promote honest and safe dialogue in a recent blog post, Courtney Harge, also the People of Color Caucus liaison, noted the ways people of color might be impacted by caucusing. Harge writes that openly participating in a caucus can be a risky and vulnerable decision for individuals who have been historically maligned within the workplace, and there is “fear of being reduced to only their racial identity, distrust of the organization’s support of the space, reluctance to identify as a POC, fear of retaliation, and internalized racism” (Harge and Wilhelm). Additionally, unconscious bias is engraved on a broader cultural level within all individuals, informing the different ways individuals might react to conflict and dissent. For example, a recent *HuffPost* article outlined the ways in which women struggle to embrace conflict within the workplace, often due to cultural perceptions related to women as nurturers and caregivers. “Women are expected to be ‘nice,’ a subtly nefarious burden... this indirect yet powerful pressure forces businesswomen to suppress their real... and healthy feelings of frustration, anger

and aggressiveness” (Brown). Leadership must acknowledge and consistently address unconscious bias in general but most certainly as it relates to how individuals within organizations might react to others’ engagement in healthy conflict and crucial dialogue.

It is important to remember that “conflict does not inevitably solve problems, contribute to firm management, and build employee commitment” (Tjosvold, “Rights” 19). Establishing caucuses and change teams can be an important part of facilitating diversity, equity, and inclusion change initiatives within an organization. These groups can be formed through the recommendation and with guidance of the outside consulting firms mentioned earlier or by the organization itself. Creating action groups can also add needed communication structure to the conflict-positive process. Within these team or staff groups, managers can actively “foster debates and expressions of differing viewpoints in an active learning context” (Tordova et al. 463) and keep conflict productively framed by the task at hand. Additionally, managers should create discussion goals and guides that position conflict as cooperative, not competitive. For example, staff conversations that are focused on dismantling systems of oppression internally that may or may not be recognized, should seek to highlight these systems, not take away from or blame individuals. “Evidence indicates that to the extent people believe their goals are cooperative they are able to make their conflicts constructive... they seek ‘win-win’ solutions that promote mutual advantage” (Tjosvold, “Rights” 15). The role of trust and mutual respect cannot be overstated. “A reinforcing, beneficial cycle of managing conflict is created in which people cherish their diversities, feel positively dependent upon each other, appreciate each other’s abilities and build upon them, and celebrate their joint success and set new improvement goals” (Tjosvold, “Rights” 22). An organization

must manage conflict-positive dialogue with these values at the forefront. Arts leaders must constantly ensure that their actions and reactions to conflict reflect these values. Employees “trust what they see and...you should say the thing and show the thing so that people can believe and trust that healthy conflict is actually allowed” (Harge).

Practical resources for increasing personal fluency in managing difficult or conflict heavy conversations can be found through many of the social justice resources and consulting organizations listed earlier. These principles are also beginning to be echoed by many leading HR and People Operations leaders. When interviewed on the topic, Tim Cynova of Fractured Atlas credited specific resources they utilized to ensure that all staff were well prepared for equity and diversity centered conflict-positive conversations. “Everyone went through crucial conversations training because you can't have those difficult conversations if you immediately jump to assuming the worst or...not feeling like you have the tools to go into a conversation that's really challenging for most people” (Cynova, Personal interview). *Crucial Conversations* is a self-help book and training workshop for “when stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions start to run strong” (Patterson et al. 17). For some organizations and individual leaders, resources like *Crucial Conversations* might offer valuable methods for structuring how to process and then respond to valuable conflict.

Reframing and managing positive-conflict environments hinges on the ability of leadership to set the tone. “Instead of getting surprised by conflict, expect it, and lean on management and facilitation skills that include listening...responding non-defensively, being open to learning, and self-reflecting about how personal and social identities can influence these interactions” (Banks). Leadership and managers must remember that in

the case of equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts, being conflict-positive is in the interest of identifying and then addressing the often-invisible systemic barriers and unconscious biases that lead to oppression of all kinds. This includes direct questioning and changes to existing power dynamics, a process that is not easy. “If subtlety and not wanting to disrupt the status quo is what you are going for, you are not going to get the change because the problem is the status quo” (Harge). When dissent and conflict-positive dialogue leads to questioning or criticizing power structures, whether directly or indirectly, leaders must remember the fundamental social justice messages behind treating power hoarding. “Understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive” (Okun 5).

This kind of constant and continued self-reflection is an ongoing part of maintaining a conflict-positive internal culture and communication strategy. It is also a core component of a sincere and meaningful equity, diversity, and inclusion initiative. When conflict is experienced and resolved, whether part of a controlled dialogue or not, managers should “take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might have been handled differently” (Okun 6). Tjosvold recommends that “positive conflict has four reinforcing components,” that include valuing diversity, seeking mutual benefit, empowering, taking stock (“Rights” 20-22). When reflecting on resolved conflict during group settings, leadership should highlight and reinforce the mutual benefit and value gained during the process. Individual self-reflection is equally important, especially for those in positions of power or social privilege. In addressing the issue of racial justice, on its website, Dismantling Racism Works lists “Know Yourself” as one of the eight core principles for taking action. Acknowledging that, regardless of one’s background,

individuals “tend to reproduce dominant culture habits of leadership and power hoarding, individualism, and either/or thinking,” and that understanding one’s own weaknesses, strengths, and vulnerabilities is integral to these conversations (“Action Tools”). Continued reflection is integral to addressing issues of inequity and in creating a truly conflict-positive internal organizational culture.

Despite the art sector’s proclivity toward positive conflict in art creation and program implementation, many arts organizations are not actively or intentionally implementing conflict-positive structures or fostering conflict-positive internal cultures. Although some organizations might be more conflict-positive due to the personalities of specific leaders, there is long-term value to developing clear structural and cultural strategies for ensuring that conflict-positive methods are formalized. The important takeaway is not that one model is better than another but that all of an arts organization’s internal systems and strategies must work together to support open communication across all levels of the organization, be more people centered, allow for at least some distribution of power and the full embracing of employee dissent. It is also evident that many of the conflict-positive strategies elevated by behavioral psychologists and organizational researchers mirror the community-building and dialogue-building principles pioneered by social justice activists. These principles are universally applicable to any group working together towards a shared purpose. Regardless of an art organization’s size, type, or mission, by better understanding the current internal structures and systems in play at a given arts organization, these conflict-positive tactics and strategies can be taught and implemented in the service of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives and goals.

Conclusion

Across the sector, sweeping public efforts, new programs, and studies are being developed to prioritize the advancement of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Funders, producers, and service organizations alike are evaluating their practices and making public statements in commitment to these values. However, recent data shows that these commitments to change are falling short. Arts organizations continue to struggle with issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in a variety of ways. In many cases, the highest echelons of power within the arts industry remain predominantly white and male, while the nuances of representation and safety for vulnerable and maligned groups also fall short.

This disconnect between intention or desire for change and the actual transformation of internal staffing and diverse representation within arts sector leadership is disheartening for many reasons. Evidence shows that diversity in internal staffing is beneficial to both the sector as a whole and to arts organizations individually. More diverse groups and equitable workspaces can lead to improved community engagement, greater innovation, increased productivity, and better decision making. Arts organizations that do not actively work to meaningfully address barriers to equity, diversity, and inclusion within their own ranks risk losing relevance in a rapidly changing creative environment.

To implement these changes, arts organizations must disrupt the unconscious biases and systemic oppression that exists within their walls. Changing something that, by definition, is interwoven into the very culture and invisible to those who benefit from it is impossible without self-reflection, challenging accepted power structures and dynamics, and allowing for those within the structure to safely voice dissent and engage in conflict-positive communication. Research from across sectors and decades of community organizing ideologies have proven that conflict can be a necessary positive force for building dialogue, addressing systemic power structures, and implementing meaningful change. Additionally, studies have shown that conflict, when properly supported and managed, can support better team decision-making, foster innovation, and elevate employees' sense of equity and shared purpose within an organization. Additionally, healthy conflict has been shown by scholars and community organizers to be a key part of any social justice change work. For arts organizations, conflict-positive internal systems are necessary in support of better team decision-making, innovation, honesty, and shared purpose toward needed equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

In general, the arts industry is not currently embracing conflict-positive internal cultures and structures through intentional action and internal processes. Most arts organizations unconsciously adopt internal structures, systems of communication, and management styles that reflect the accepted status quo, with little thought to how these components inform internal culture and prohibit engaged, constructively critical dialogue and socially relevant employee dissent. However, in many ways, the industry is well suited for a conflict-positive approach to internal structure and culture. Arts organizations have been pioneering these same conflict-positive strategies through external

programming and art creation processes. By taking a critical look at the staffing structures, power dynamics, internal policies, and communication strategies that inform organizations' leadership structures and internal cultures, arts administrators can more effectively transition to and implement a conflict-positive model. More importantly, they can implement internal conflict-positive strategies and systems in direct support of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

The arts sector is at a critical moment of change. Future generations of art administrators, creators, donors, and audiences are prioritizing actions, institutions, and programs that push back against the systemic barriers and unconscious biases that were once ignored. Not knowing or understanding these issues is no longer acceptable for organizational leaders, and the industry must begin to grow towards a more equitable and inclusive future. Arts organizations must engage with the social justice and community organization principles that are framing these conversations, reassess their internal approaches to conflict and people management, and reflect on the role of leadership, both individually and collectively, as either an inhibitor to change or a facilitator. Arts administrators must remember the powerful and positive role of conflict as a means of voicing dissent, highlighting inequity, and challenging negative power dynamics. Arts organizations that incorporate a conflict-positive internal culture and approach to leadership can more effectively identify and address the systemic and institutional barriers preventing diversity, equity, and inclusion within their own institutions.

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