



**Arts  
Centre  
Melbourne**

# Forward to better

The role you play in  
shaping our future



# The Role You Play

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Like many performing arts centres all around the world, Arts Centre Melbourne will not be returning to business as usual. As we begin to feel movement towards reopening and recovery, it can be helpful to consider what that means for the role you play.

How can we spot opportunities to positively engage with change as we work towards bringing our teams together again? This guide introduces four key concepts: growth mindsets; design thinking; appreciative inquiry; and dominant logic to encourage us to bring optimistic curiosity to what happens next for ACM.

## Change is certain

Sometimes we resist change. This is understandable - we might be feeling disconnected, exhausted or overwhelmed by the speed and scale of changes in our industry and communities over the last few months. The impacts of this time on our people, thinking, revenue, and operations are real and will continue to be felt for a long time.

This means we need to consciously hold complexity – on the one hand to effectively and gently respond to these sometimes devastating realities, and on the other to plan for our shared future with hope, optimism and an openness to possibility.

## Kindness always matters

As we begin to emerge from lock down, everyone will move through the phases of recovery differently. Kindness is a bridge to understanding, and it can get us across the turbulent waters of change more effectively than anything else. The impacts of COVID-19 reach beyond Arts Centre Melbourne, so be generous with your time and compassion when engaging with friends and colleagues across the industry and in your lives.

## Actions:

Think about what you have learnt over the last few months, and consider:

- What do I want to see happen now?
- How can we work differently? Are there new collaborations possible?
- What do we need to remember and how can we share what we have learnt?
- What can I take from this experience to build a stronger, more resilient working life or organisation?
- What role can I play in supporting or connecting others in our industry?

# Enquiring minds welcome

In this guide you will find more questions than answers – because now is the time for us to question everything. As you work through the guide, ask yourself not, “What can we do better?”, but, “Are we doing the right things?”

This is about grasping the opportunity at the heart of this crisis to better our organisation and our sector. It is not about throwing out old ways for the sake of the new. If we take this time to think deeply about why we do what we do and bring our extensive skills, knowledge and experience to this thinking, we can move forward mindfully.

ACM is proud to guide, support and inspire the sector. Together we can move the performing arts – not back to business as usual, but forward to better, for good.

## Key concepts

**Growth mindset:** the belief that abilities are not fixed but can be developed through conscious effort and practice. Seeing setbacks as learning opportunities and persevering through adversity are the hallmarks of a growth mindset.

**Design Thinking:** a problem-solving process which seeks to understand what people experience and need in order to challenge assumptions and create innovative solutions. The method consists of five phases: empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test.

**Appreciative Inquiry:** a way of asking questions that actively engages people in self-determined change. It is a method of inquiry that focusses on generating new ideas and ways of working, rather than simply on solving problems.

**Dominant Logic:** refers to the mental maps we develop through experience. In an organisational setting, it refers to the cultural norms and beliefs of a company which can be positive, or which may hinder its ability to change.

## Actions:

Think about our usual ways of doing things and consider:

- How can we bring the best with us? What existing experience, skills and knowledge can we incorporate into our future?
- How can we honour and gently let go of aspects of our past which no longer serve us?
- What actions would positively challenge the status quo?

# Leadership

## Courage is not the absence of fear

Courage is the ability to do something you find frightening, or to find strength in the face of pain or grief. Holding a growth mindset requires bravery: accepting and learning from your setbacks and mistakes, continually choosing to act with integrity, and being willing to try again and do better next time: these are acts of courage.

Often the ideas that most scare us are those that challenge our self-conceptions, our place in a group, or our habits. This is one of the reasons so many of us struggle with change, and why the last couple of months have provoked such widespread anxiety. We naturally try to avoid ideas that challenge us in these ways, and if we can't avoid them we may become defensive, aggressive, or closed off in order to protect ourselves.

## The power of habit

It's a big ask to say: "now's the time to rethink how we do everything!" After all, our ways of working are essentially habits and it takes time and conscious effort to change a habit. To move towards a growth mindset, it can help to gently experiment with our habitual assumptions and ways of doing things.

### Action: what does it feel like to form a new habit?

1. Grab a pen and a piece of paper and write your name
2. Change the pen to your other hand and write your name again
3. Reflect on how that felt compared to the first time. What did the results look like?

The second time takes longer, requires more concentration, and the results are generally not as good. But it is possible! If you did this every day, your non-dominant hand would get better and better. This is great news as it shows that results come more from practice than capability.

Our habits are actions we practice so often we can do them without conscious thought. What things do you do in your work without conscious thought? Can you dig into your courage to really look at these habits to see which are useful and which are not?

## Be prepared to change your thinking and your mind.

# Community

## Every person holds a part of the answer

In new and complex situations it's common to rush towards any certainty we can find rather than sit with the discomfort of ambiguity. Studies of problem-solving sessions show that generally people propose solutions more than they ask questions by a factor of eight to one!

Early solutions are seldom best – they are limited to information we have close by or to our existing knowledge and experience. While these may have served us in the past, they may not be best suited to our current situation.

Unfortunately, when we seek to address problems by immediately offering solutions without adequate reflection or collaboration, we may work very hard on things that are ultimately not effective.

## Find the root cause

Design Thinking asks us to empathise – this means taking time to listen in order to understand a problem from the perspective of those who experience it. By involving people in finding solutions to what they experience directly it's possible to identify the root causes of issues. Once a problem is clearly understood, solutions can then be found that address or remove its causes, not just the symptoms.

### Action:

- In a problem-solving or brainstorming session, set aside at least 50% of the time for questions and problem definition before attempting to explore any solutions.

## Involve more minds

When trying to solve a problem, it's easy to fall into the trap of seeking input from the same people we always do, or only from people like us. We may rely on accepted wisdom and previous models rather than seeking to understand more. We all use these kinds of 'thinking-shortcuts' at times in order to make decisions quickly. Unfortunately, they can obscure our ability to notice emerging trends or hear the wisdom of other perspectives.

### Action:

To move towards recovery and reopening mindfully, consider:

- Who haven't we heard from? How can we listen better?
- Have we spoken to the people most directly impacted by this and sought their ideas and experiences?

Ask the right questions and you'll find the right solutions.

# Care More

## Safety enables us to take risks

Have you ever been in a situation where you had something great to contribute to a discussion but bit your tongue because you feared being judged or ridiculed, or felt it was likely someone else would take credit for your idea? Most of us have experienced this at some point. How many world-changing ideas are lost in these moments?

**People speak up when it feels safe to do so:** when their ideas are met with open minds and kind words, and when the value of their work is recognised and rewarded. To get the best ideas and outcomes means creating the right environment for people to make a positive contribution.

## Use your words wisely

Appreciative Inquiry asks us to pay attention to language – this means being conscious of the words we commonly use and the way in which language shapes our own and other people's realities.

Imagine if someone you admire called you stupid or useless every day – what effect do you think this would have on you over time? What if the same person called you smart, and said your contributions were valuable?

Words create worlds. Our choice of vocabulary can trigger feelings, images, and understandings in our own minds and in the people around us. The words we use to describe our shared future matter - the more positive and hopeful they are, the more positive the present-day action can be.

Being conscious of language means we can choose to create positive, optimistic visions of the future to inspire and awaken the best in ourselves and in others.

## Action: consider the words you commonly say to yourself and to others

- Do I offer positive or negative ideas about myself, other people, or the future?
- How can I use more positive language with myself and others?
- In what ways can I consciously include others through my words and actions?
- What's needed for everyone to be able to do their best work?

Use your words to create the world you want to live in.

# Creativity

## Stand with values, play with outcomes

Imagine change as letting go of one trapeze in the air to catch the next one. For a fraction of a second, you have nothing to hold. Then you reach out, catch the next bar, and swing up towards a new platform and a new place.

If you hang on to the first trapeze – if you do not let go – you will either return to the same old platform you started from, or you will lose momentum and stop until your grip fails and you fall to the ground.

Positive change is letting go, with momentum. If we move with it, change can provide us the forward motion we need to get from where we are to where we want to be. So how do we do this? How do we move forward, to better?

## Actions:

- Stay informed about what's changing around you. Ask 'why?' a lot.
- Know your personal values, and the values of ACM. Values can help you judge between options when you're not sure which path to take.
- Play with possible outcomes. How many can you come up with? Try not to get stuck on a preferred way forward. Focus on creating lots of ideas rather than on finding the 'right' one.
- Visualise a different and better future. Talk about it. Invite ideas. Read widely. Speak with those who have successfully pulled off changes. Experiment. The more you do this, the more comfortable you'll feel.

## Dodge thinking traps

Dominant Logic theory asks us to engage with our entrenched mental models to see where they serve us, and where they might blinker us to new or better ways of doing things.

Our thinking is cumulative, which means we build our ideas of the world and our place in it from our experiences over time. When we experience rapid change, our patterns of thinking can hold us back. To move beyond your dominant logic, set aside ideas of 'good' or 'bad' and ask yourself:

- When am I at my best and how do I know?
- What can I change for the better? What will I do now?

Innovation is another word for play.

# Further reading

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[Decode the dominant logic](#)

[The arts after Covid-19: Let's fix the things that weren't right before](#)

[The Five Whys Technique](#)

[What is Appreciative Inquiry?](#)

[Three Long-Term Lessons From Crisis-Inspired Collaboration](#)