

GROUP RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

Team Tea and Buns

Who is involved?

- Our Extend group (Carly Mee, Cath Sherrell, Louise French, Lesley-Ann Smith, Fiona Mair – Key Contact)
- Interviewees from external organisations (to be clarified, as described below)

Our area of enquiry

Our starting point was to ask:

Is there anything unique about the way leadership is practised in the arts sector?

We wanted to investigate and interrogate leadership in the arts and then directly compare our findings with leadership in another field – namely, the corporate sector.

How do we, as arts learning professionals, perceive and currently use leadership skills and qualities and styles?

Would our arts leadership skills/ qualities/ styles differentiate us from leaders in the corporate sector?

How would people in leadership roles in a business setting perceive and currently use leadership skills/ qualities/ styles?

By mapping the elements that contribute to leadership, and analysing overlaps and gaps, we hoped to:

- learn more about leadership
- show similarities and differences in leadership in the arts and corporate sectors
- better understand and articulate our own leadership
- draw conclusions about the leadership which might be best suited to advocating for the value of the arts and their transformational power.

Why have we chosen this area of enquiry?

We considered researching several different sectors outside the arts - including the formal learning, voluntary and charity sectors - to use as comparators. We then decided to focus on a single sector for comparison to make the most efficient use of the time we had available. Narrowing our focus would also give us sufficient evidence from which to draw some comparative conclusions.

We chose the corporate sector as a comparator because we believed it would be the most different to learning in the arts. It was the sector whose practices we felt we knew the least about. And during our initial discussions we found that we all thought that a corporate style

would be especially 'hard-edged' and single-focused because of the underlying profit motive. We also anticipated that the corporate sector would invest in more in leadership training. We also wondered how valued creativity was in the corporate sector, and how this contributed to /was part of good leadership.

So talking to people from business would allow us to examine our own preconceptions and biases towards the corporate world.

What questions did we set out to answer?

- Are our leadership skills / qualities/ styles unique to our learning-in-the-arts settings and do they differentiate us from leaders in other fields?
- What are the leadership approaches that we use in our own practice within arts learning?
- Are there leadership approaches that the arts and corporate sectors share?
- What are the differences in approaches to leadership across the arts and corporate sectors?
- What are the skills / qualities / styles that could prove valuable to each? Are they transferable across the sectors?
- How valid are our preconceptions of the corporate sector?
- How could a better understanding of the leadership approaches in the corporate sector benefit the arts? Could the corporate sector benefit from a better understanding of an arts leadership style?
- Might one sort of leadership be best suited to advocating for the value of the arts and their transformational power?

How we went about answering our questions

In summary, we interviewed each member of our group to uncover each of our leadership skill/ qualities/ styles. We interviewed 9 people in the corporate sector. We included our Extend cohort peers' views on arts and corporate leadership. We then mapped and analysed the resulting data to show the similarities and differences in leadership approaches.

First Residential, Leeds, June 2014

Here we discussed our common areas of interest. These included:

- Demonstrating the benefits of creative learning
- Supporting people in developing the skills to become an arts learning professional

- Testing our assumptions about what you need to become a leader in arts education
- What values are unique to arts learning?
- Leading change
- Different levels of leadership
- Do our values as arts learning leaders distinguish us from other sectors?

This last seemed to be the most popular and also to be a manageable subject area to explore.

We also collated our Extend cohort's initial ideas on the skills/ qualities/ styles we each thought we used in our day-to-day work in the arts, as well as their initial ideas on leadership skills/ qualities /styles.

Group Meeting – Birmingham Ikon, July 2014

We distilled our initial ideas from the Residential into a more coherent project plan.

Key roles and responsibilities within the group were established along with a timeline for the project, including dates for future meetings. We also began the outline of our Group Research Proposal.

Stage One interviews – interview each other

Our aim was to find out from each other instances when we had demonstrated leadership skills/ qualities/ styles in our work. And also times when a project we had worked on was not successful and what contributed to that failure (what qualities might have been missing?)

We had noted at our first Residential that when each of us in the cohort had described our skills/ qualities/ styles we saw these very differently to how we later described generic leadership skills/ qualities/ styles. Perhaps we weren't able to recognise our own leadership skills, or perhaps we underplayed them - inclined to be too self-effacing to want to list our own leadership qualities. So, to elicit our own leadership strengths, we opted for interviews loosely based on the coaching methods learned at our first Residential in the hope that the leadership qualities would 'emerge' out of conversation. The hope was that by not directly asking each other 'In what ways are you a good leader?' or similar, but instead by asking each other to describe actual examples from our work (that is, based on our actual practice rather than our perception of it) a truer picture would emerge. To further aid this, the interviewer rather than the interviewee would later analyse the transcripts to identify leadership attributes.

In our interviews, we each talked about one or two projects that we felt were successful and unsuccessful to interrogate the leadership styles we, and others we have worked with, have used. The interviews were via Skype or face-to-face between members of our group, and recorded to allow us to notetake, and then transcribe at a later date.

We shared our transcriptions from these group coaching sessions and shared with the other members of the group via email. In analysing this data, we found out what leadership skills each of us used in the two projects. This told us what we each consider/ value/ identify as leadership skills.

Group Meeting – London, Friends Meeting House, October 2014

At the group meeting in London we shared the key findings from the interviews we conducted with each other. These allowed us to distil down the key leadership skills we feel we demonstrate in our working practice, which would form the benchmark for the comparator study with the corporate sector.

We then discussed how to best approach the interview with our corporate contacts. We recognised that while it is preferable to conduct the interviews face-to-face, this may not be possible due to distance and time constraints. We also recognised that as we are asking busy people to give us their time, we needed to aim to keep the interviews succinct, limiting them to 30-45 minutes. We also wanted to make sure that we were gathering comparable information, so we spent some time formulating a questionnaire. This would allow us to keep the face-to-face interviews as uniform as possible, while also allowing for the possibility of having to ask for responses via email.

Stage Two interviews – with the corporate sector

We conducted semi-structured interviews, each using our set of core questions for consistency, but with scope to explore themes that the interviewees raised. We conducted all our interviews face-to-face. These are the people we interviewed:

- Keith Bruce, Arts Editor, The Herald
- Mike Collins, Head of Learning Solutions, DPG Limited
- Keith Davis, CEO, Borough Market
- David Gibbs, Director of Digital Media, Sky Sports
- Operations Manager at a major retailer
- Gary Langridge, Sales Director, Jaguar Land Rover
- Chris Leftly, HR Manager, Rachel's Dairy
- Philip Pilgrim, Consultant
- Steve Regulski, Manager, HSE Legislative Compliance and Social Responsibility, Nexen Petroleum UK

In selecting the people / companies we wished to approach, we considered primarily getting a spread of companies across different areas of the corporate sector. It occurred to us with hindsight that we had only spoken to people who were in managerial roles within those companies. Given more time it might have been interesting to compare their responses to people within the same companies who were not in management positions.

We began to extract the leadership skills and qualities that were evidenced in our interviews, sharing these via email, and developing comparator lists with the skills and qualities uncovered at the first residential and in our group interviews.

Second Residential, Leeds, January 2015

We shared our initial findings with our cohort and guests, receiving feedback and suggestions. We also made plans for our final group meeting Birmingham and began to distil ideas for our final presentation.

Two-day Group meeting – Library of Birmingham, February 2015

We spent a good amount of time sorting, distilling and analysing our results. We had generated a substantial volume of raw data which was too unwieldy to use in our final report. Through discussing this data we began identifying and consolidating patterns in our research. We were also able to identify areas where additional research may have been useful and/ or interesting.

We drafted our final report, assigned tasks to enable its completion, and shared our ideas for our final presentation.

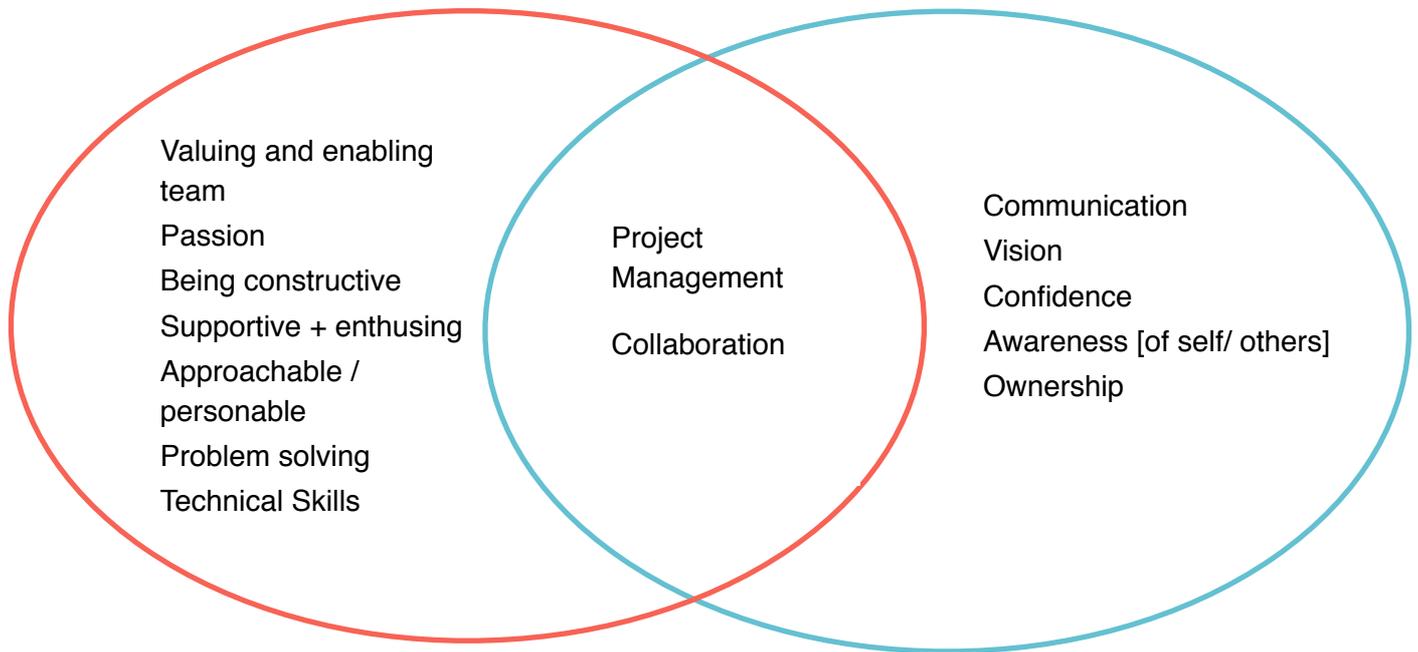
Findings

Our initial findings, which we presented at the second residential, were as follows:

- Our prejudices (for example, that the corporate sector would not value creativity or collaborative working) had been challenged
- In the arts sector almost all jobs have a functional role, whereas in the interviews it was clear that there were specific roles for leadership within the corporate sector
- Arts sector training came across as under-resourced whereas the corporate sector considered it extremely valuable to invest in the employees providing a structured progression
- In the arts sector there appeared to be more limited opportunities to progress.

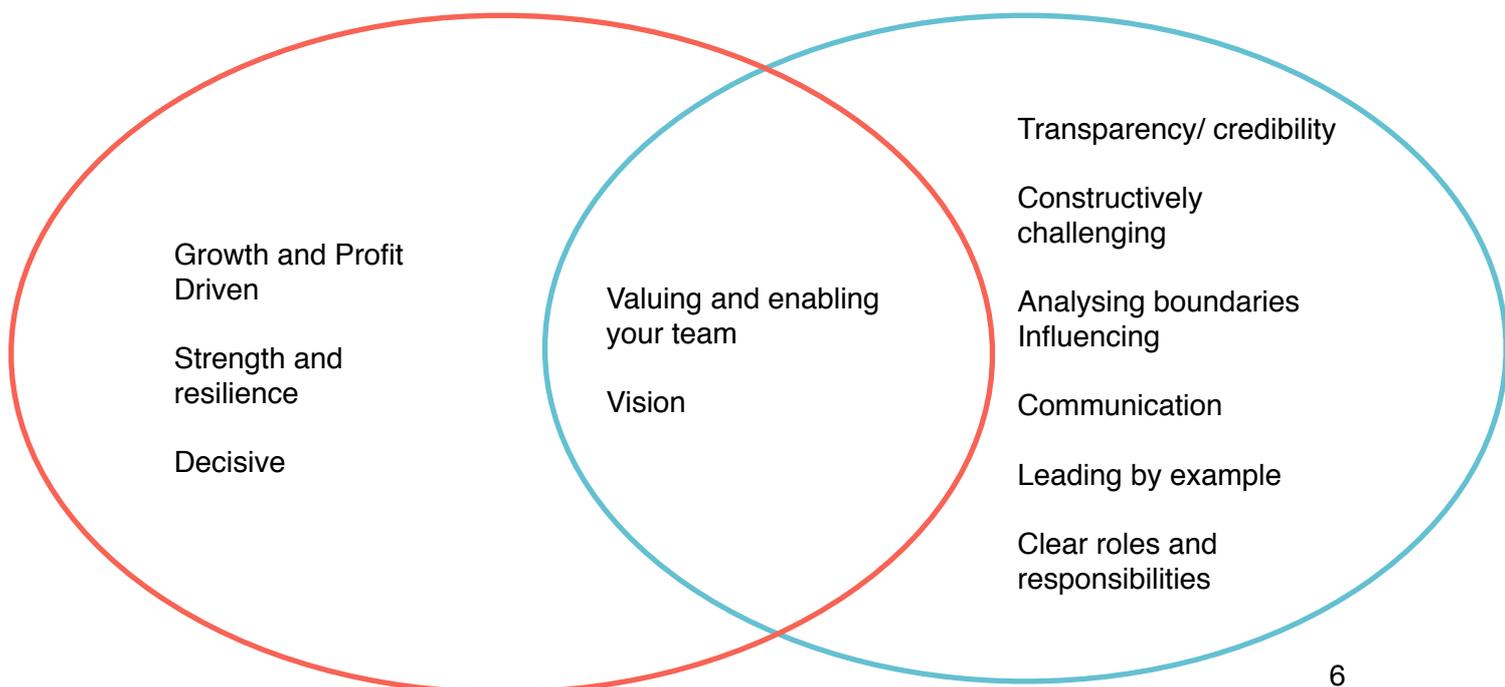
At our final group meeting we compiled and compared the following groups of leadership skills, qualities and behaviours. They are laid out below in a series of Venn diagrams showing the two lists being compared with the areas of overlap in the centre.

Cohort's perceptions of our skills and qualities (1st Residential) v successful Arts Learning leadership skills and qualities (our group interviews)



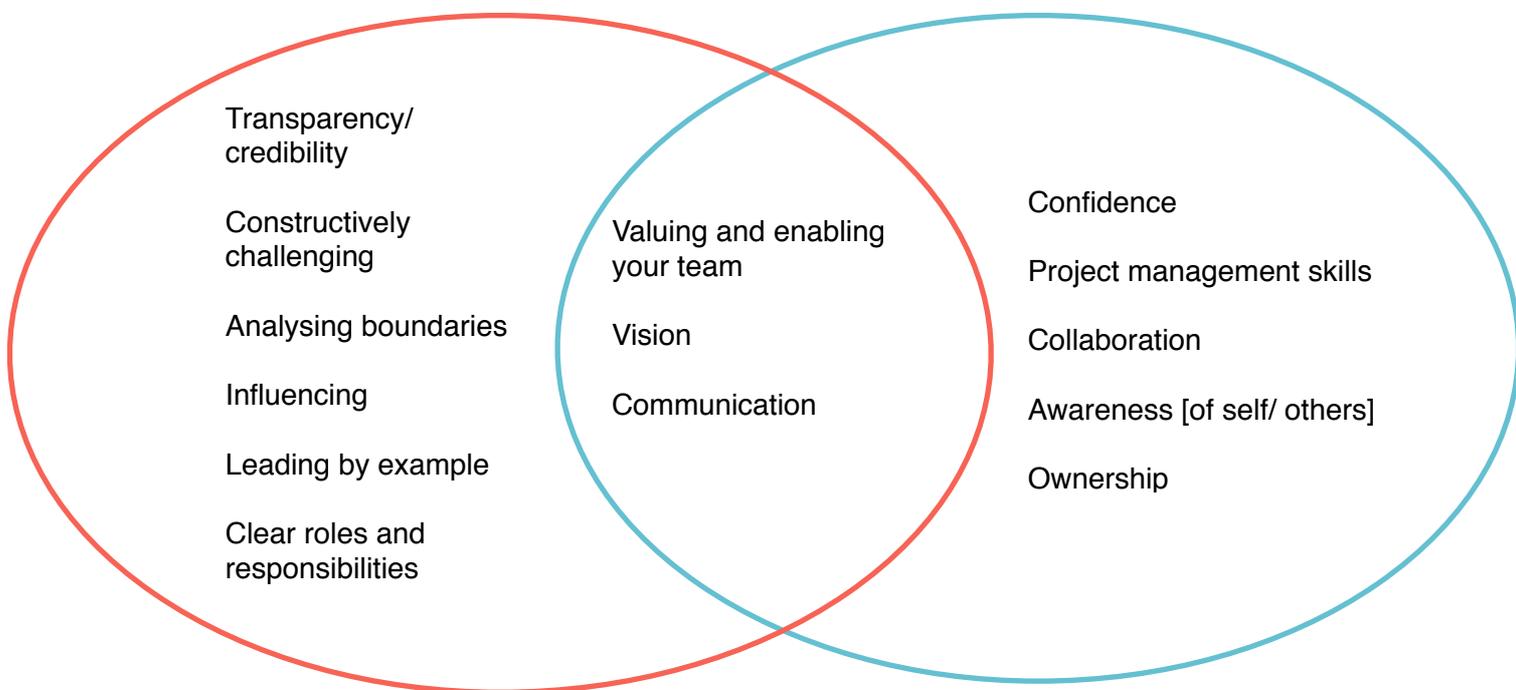
This comparison seems to suggest that at the early stages of Extend we were uncomfortable thinking about ourselves as leaders or using the kinds of terms we would associate with leadership to describe ourselves. It was only in analysing our interviews that we began to develop an understanding of how we actually demonstrate leadership in our daily practice, and that this is different from how we might deliver the tasks associated with our job functions.

Cohort presumption of Corporate leadership styles v actual Corporate successful leadership skills and qualities (from interviews)



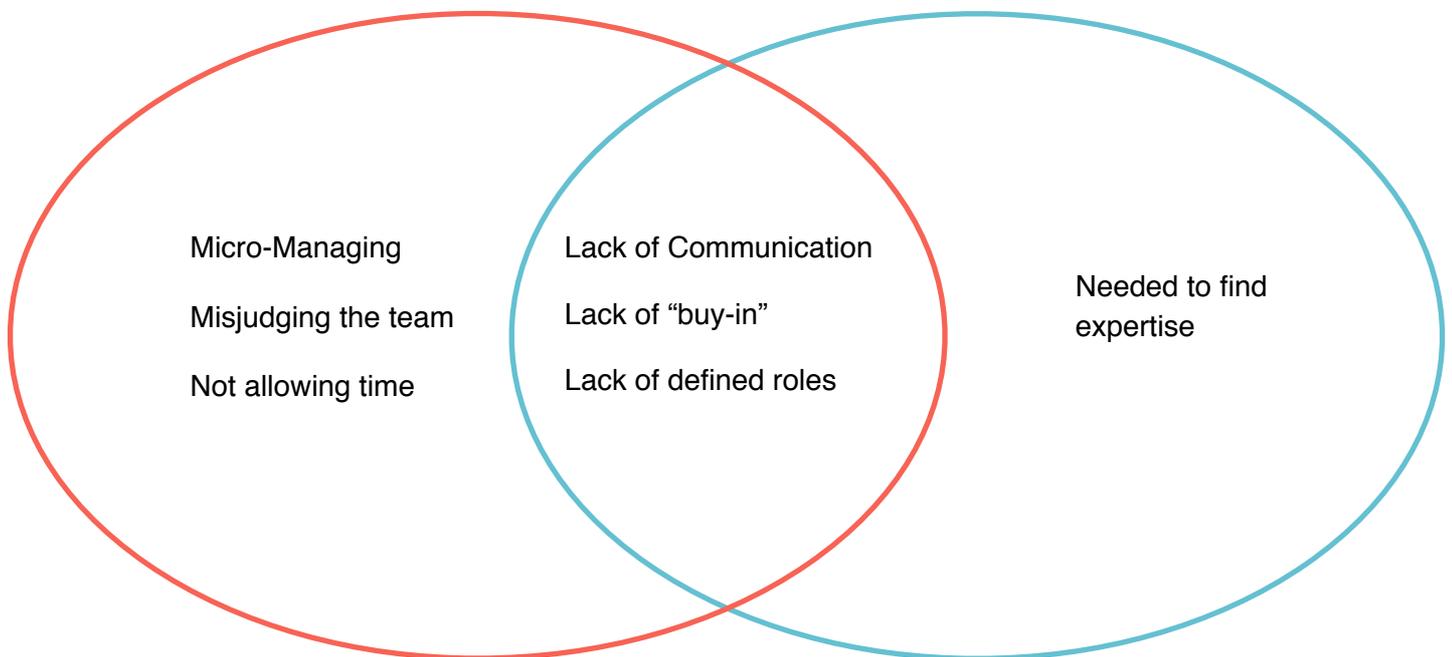
The cohort reflected many of the presumptions we had held ourselves about the corporate sector, and validated our decision to focus on this sector for our comparison. We expected the corporate sector to be much "harder" than us, to be more focused on profit and to have that as a prime motivation in their practice of leadership. In reality, our corporate contacts referred very rarely to profit goals or business growth. Their interest lay much more in developing and supporting their teams, the implication being that by doing this they would achieve their goals, regardless of what those goals may be.

Corporate successful leadership skills and qualities (from interviews) v Arts Learning successful leadership skills (from interviews)



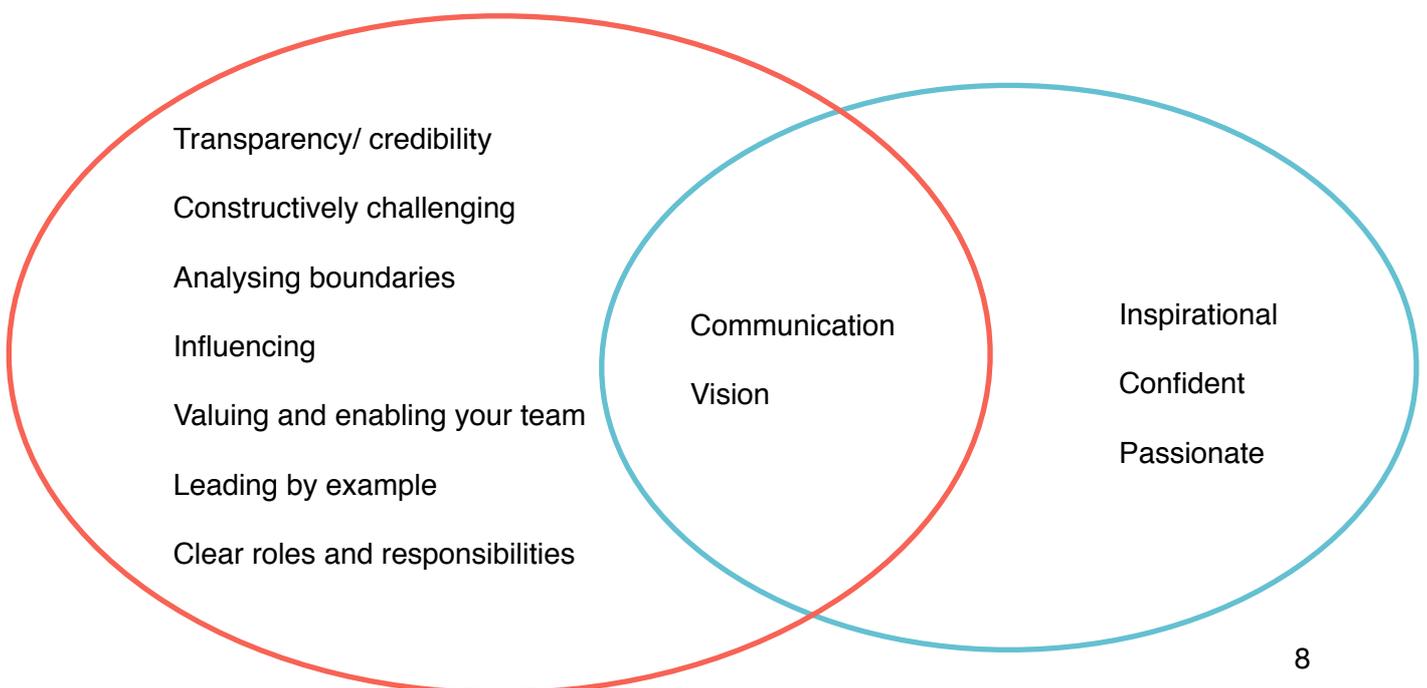
We felt that there were more areas of similarity between our leadership skills and those valued by the corporate sector than is perhaps illustrated in this diagram. The key thing that we took away is that we are both very focused on people and that communicating, supporting and developing your team is the most effective way to achieve results. The corporate sector seemed to be more interested in issues surrounding boundaries and roles than we were. This is perhaps because in their sectors there are more potentially major consequences if things go wrong, therefore understanding how far you can push and take risks is more important. We also felt it was interesting that we felt the need to verbalise confidence as an explicit quality. It seemed that in the corporate sector confidence was implied and expected in a successful leader.

Factors in unsuccessful Corporate leadership (from interviews) v factors in unsuccessful Arts Learning leadership (from interviews)



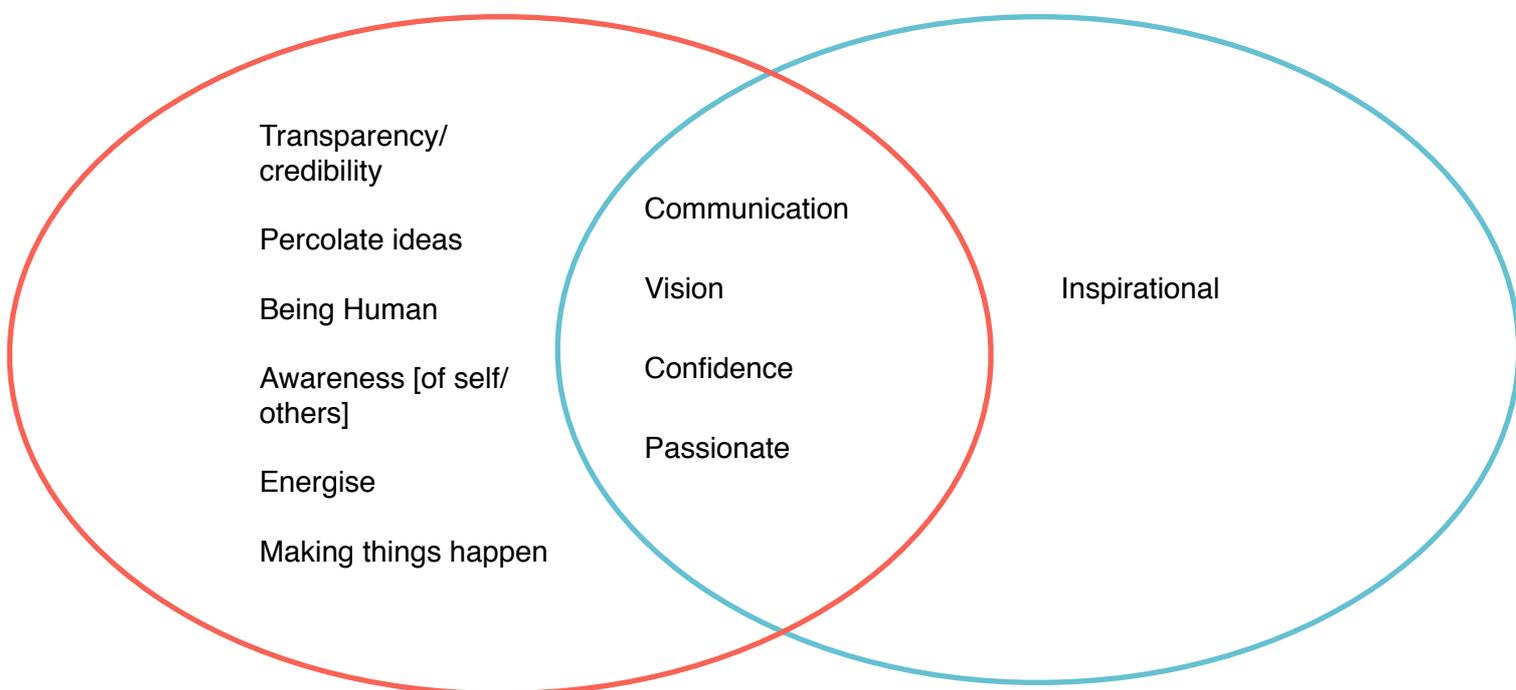
Our corporate contacts seemed to find it more difficult than us to find examples of where their leadership had been less successful, but when they did they came up with a more diverse range of reasons for why they had experienced difficulties. It was interesting to note that they placed a huge emphasis on communication in various guises, as did we. It is evident that is a major factor in how effective leadership manifests itself.

Corporate successful leadership skills and qualities v Cohort final view of good leadership (2nd Residential)



These two lists show perhaps the biggest differences. The corporate sector's leadership skills seem much more "down-to-earth". They're not rooted in day-to-day tasks, but are perhaps more tangible than the cohort's expectations of good leadership. The cohort's vision of a good leader seems much more demonstrative and energetic, whereas the corporate seems to value a quieter, more low-key approach. The language the corporate sector used seemed to suggest a preference for a more distributed, shared model of leadership, whereas the language our cohort used seems to suggest something more directional.

Cohort perception of leadership skills and qualities at 1st Residential v Cohort perception of leadership skills and qualities at 2nd Residential



The words our cohort used to describe effective leadership at the beginning and the end of Extend had not changed dramatically. Perhaps they had been refined slightly, but the amount of crossover between the two lists suggests that our journey through this programme had been so much about uncovering what effective leadership is, but rather how we might learn to demonstrate it in our own working practice.

Broader findings

Our corporate contacts did not list 'communication' as a discreet skill, as often as might be expected, however, the importance of good communication was implied frequently. For the sake of clarity, in our analysis we used the word communication, but these are some of the terms actually used in our interviews:

- work to common goal
- everyone to follow same direction
- collaboration
- people on board
- friendly – say hello
- talk to people to understand need for change
- getting everyone to follow same direction
- listen to what people are saying around you
- communicate simply

The corporate sector seems to use communication and softer skills because they recognise their effectiveness, even if the end target is different from ours. We tend to value them in and of themselves.

We felt that a major difference between us and the corporate sector was the importance they place on positive reinforcement and advocacy. A number of our contacts talked about how they celebrate successes within their team, and how as you start to achieve successes, you promote these more widely and so advocate for your work, as well as acknowledging success within team. Corporate people really think about how they celebrate success and how they ensure all members of a team have the chance to be successful.

One of our most striking findings was the number of similarities between learning in the arts and the corporate sector. Where corporate contacts used slightly different language, from our interviews there was a shared emphasis on building and supporting teams, communication, and vision. We felt that while terms such as "talent recruitment", "customer", "business", "investment" and "cross-functional opportunities" may not be commonplace within the arts sector, they were sufficiently familiar that they did not create a barrier between us and our corporate contacts.

In order to more easily communicate our findings we commissioned freelance designer Alison Bowman to create a downloadable infographic and website. This can be viewed at wheretwoworldscollide.uk

Questions that have come up that might warrant further investigation

As we have explored models of leadership in the arts and corporate sectors, a number of questions began to arise. We did not have time to address these, but they would be interesting research areas in their own rights.

- Are different leadership styles more prominent in either men or women?
- Language in different contexts – lots of similar things but they're expressed differently
- Uncovered opposing views on the extent to which subject-specific knowledge is helpful or essential for good leadership – perhaps credibility is key to this – a leader makes a judgment about the level of required knowledge (in a negotiation, for example) and if necessary involves people who do have the required subject knowledge.
- To what extent does the sense of pressure in the arts (feeling we need achieve results/ outputs) means we don't have time to 'play' or test ideas or try/fail/learn. Our findings suggest that the corporate sector values this more – and actually contributes resources to supporting it. Is this possible in the arts in today's financial climate?

Our reflections on the Group Project

Through the process of working on the group project, we have all felt we've used a fair, even and mutual shared leadership model. We have managed the process of using dispersed leadership, coming together regularly when needed but also contributing separately using our areas of expertise. We have gained an increased confidence in ourselves and clarity in leadership skills through this specific project, particularly through the group interviews and corporate interviews, and the ongoing discussions as a group. It has kept it at the forefront of our thinking.

We have enjoyed working as a team, and the opportunity to develop ideas and projects collaboratively with people working towards a shared goal. We enjoyed learning from people outside of our specific sector. We each felt a responsibility to the group and this ensured we hit all deadlines, removing our sometimes habitual response in a work circumstance where we might procrastinate, micro-manage or not have clear targets.

We have found shared leadership to be an effective way of working and some group members have tried to implement this back in the workplace, although it can be difficult when direction at work is often led from above or by a specific goal. You therefore don't have the same shared responsibility and buy-in from everyone, as we have had through this project. However, we have had the opportunity to make use of the skills we've learnt throughout the process: leading with an idea, learning to trust in other colleagues and apply a more collaborative style of leadership.