

Case study:

Strengthening Leadership, Culture and Capability During Sector-Wide Change

Overview

Hunter Adams partnered with a leading arts and cultural organisation during a period of significant transformation, providing interim People leadership to stabilise operations, deliver critical people initiatives, and strengthen organisational capability. Through a pragmatic, people-centred approach, the organisation enhanced leadership alignment, modernised its People function, and delivered key change programmes at pace.

The Challenge

The organisation was navigating a period of substantial change, driven by both strategic transformation and wider financial pressures across the cultural sector.

Key priorities included:

- Transitioning to a dual operating base across two major cities
- Responding to reduced funding and financial pressures
- Delivering multiple critical People initiatives simultaneously

At the same time, there were several immediate People-related challenges requiring attention:

- Implementation of a new HRIS integrated with payroll
- Delivery of a culture change programme focused on psychological safety and “speaking up”
- Development of an enhanced EDI strategy aligned to Board priorities
- Supporting business cases linked to organisational structure, property, and revenue generation

All of this was taking place alongside the launch of a new season - creating multiple pressure points where maintaining performance and engagement was essential.

The Underlying Complexity

While the organisation faced several operational challenges, the underlying issue centred on communication, alignment, and leadership cohesion.

There was:

- A lack of consistent internal messaging around change and progress
- Uncertainty among employees, impacting engagement
- A need for stronger alignment across the leadership team

Externally, the organisation was under significant scrutiny, with stakeholder expectations and funding considerations closely tied to its ability to demonstrate progress.

Internally, the need to deliver change while maintaining day-to-day operations, added further complexity.

The Approach

Hunter Adams deployed an experienced interim People Director to provide strategic leadership and delivery oversight.

The approach focused on clarity, engagement, and delivery:

- **Stakeholder alignment:** Identifying and engaging key stakeholders early, including the Executive Team and Board
- **Clear prioritisation:** Defining and sequencing critical People projects in partnership with leadership
- **Governance and structure:** Establishing clear decision-making frameworks and approval processes
- **Integrated project and communications planning:** Ensuring each initiative had a clear delivery roadmap and associated engagement strategy
- **Leadership enablement:** Supporting the Executive Team to lead change effectively within their areas

A strong emphasis was placed on bringing leaders on the journey, ensuring ownership and accountability for delivering change.

Overcoming Challenges

The engagement involved navigating a fast-paced and complex environment:

- Multiple competing priorities requiring simultaneous delivery
- Uncertainty driven by evolving organisational direction
- Balancing consultation with the need for timely decision-making
- Leadership changes during the programme, including CEO and CFO transitions

These challenges were addressed through:

- **Radical transparency:** Regular updates to the Executive Team, fostering open discussion and feedback
- **Evidence-based decision-making:** Using data to support recommendations and guide discussions
- **Consistent senior engagement:** Regular 1:1 sessions with leaders to address concerns and build alignment
- **Structured communication:** Ensuring the right messages reached the right audiences at the right time

This created trust, clarity, and momentum across the organisation.

The Outcome

The organisation successfully delivered a wide range of People initiatives to time, quality, and budget, including:

- Implementation of a modern HRIS system, with further investment secured for recruitment technology
- Development and Board approval of a revised EDI strategy aligned with best practice and funding expectations
- Greater clarity around the organisation's future operating model and strategic direction
- Strengthened leadership capability, particularly in relation to culture and communication
- Increased visibility and credibility of the People function across the organisation

The Impact

The programme delivered tangible and lasting benefits:

- **Improved employee engagement**, driven by clearer communication and stronger leadership alignment
- **Enhanced organisational capability**, with leaders better equipped to manage change
- **Modernised People infrastructure**, supporting more efficient and data-driven decision-making
- **Stronger stakeholder confidence**, both internally and externally
- **A more cohesive leadership team**, operating with greater consistency and shared purpose

Key Lessons

This engagement highlights several critical success factors:

- **Engagement drives delivery:** Early and consistent involvement of leaders is essential
- **Clarity builds confidence:** Transparent communication reduces uncertainty and improves engagement
- **Prioritisation is critical:** Focusing on what matters most ensures progress in complex environments
- **Be prepared to challenge:** Effective change requires clear perspectives and sometimes difficult decisions

Why Hunter Adams

This project demonstrates Hunter Adams' strength in providing experienced interim leadership during complex, high-profile change.

By combining strategic insight, hands-on delivery, and strong stakeholder management, Hunter Adams enabled the organisation to navigate uncertainty, deliver critical initiatives, and build stronger foundations for the future.

Managing change in a complex, high-profile environment?

Partner with Hunter Adams to bring clarity, leadership, and momentum to your most critical people challenges.

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