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**‘The most creative organization in the world’?
The BBC, ‘creativity’ and managerial style**

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The managerial styles of two BBC directors-general, John Birt and Greg Dyke, have often been contrasted but not so far analysed from the perspective of their different views of ‘creative management’. This article first addresses the orthodox reading of ‘Birtism’; second, it locates Dyke’s ‘creative’ turn in the wider context of fashionable neo-management theory and UK government creative industries policy; third, it details Dyke’s drive to change the BBC’s culture; and finally, it concludes with some reflections on the uncertainties inherent in managing a creative organisation.

Keywords: BBC; culture change; creativity; leadership; management style; UK government policy

‘By the time I left, I was able reasonably to claim not only that the BBC was the world’s most creative and trusted broadcaster, but that we were now the most effectively managed public sector institution in the UK.’ John Birt, BBC Director-General, 1992-2000 (Birt 2002: 449)

‘I couldn’t conceive that anyone could have believed that this was the way to run a creative organization.’ Greg Dyke, BBC Director-General, 2000-2004 (Dyke 2005: 201)

‘A firm’s culture, like all culture, depends on how ordinary people make sense of an institution, not the explanation which those at the top decree.’ Richard Sennett (2006: 72)

Introduction

The BBC is one of the UK’s best-known global brands. Its fundamental purpose has always been to produce what we now call ‘cultural content’. It began life in 1922 as a private company producing radio programmes; it then became a public corporation in 1927 under a Royal Charter. It rapidly became a national institution, especially given its central role in building morale and reporting during World War II. After the War, the BBC became a monopoly supplier of television broadcasting. It lost its monopoly first of television (in 1955) and then of radio broadcasting (in 1973) as commercial competitors entered the scene. While its decisions have often been questioned, over a period of more than eighty years the BBC has achieved a unique position as a political and cultural force in British society and is frequently hailed as a model overseas. The BBC has been an important initiator of technological innovation and the most important single source of trained broadcasting personnel in the UK. Financed by the television licence fee, it has been a keystone of the UK’s broadcasting economy. Now, as we approach the age of ‘post-broadcasting’, the linear distribution and consumption of programmes has increasingly become but one of several options available to broadcasters and audiences. Since the early post-millennium years, the BBC’s mighty online presence has established itself as the corporation’s third arm. From being seen as ‘the wireless’ to becoming a digital media organisation has been a complex journey.

The BBC’s communicative ubiquity, sheer visibility and inescapable political weight have meant that it is perpetually scrutinised and criticised. From the start, successive governments have set up royal commissions and – once those fell out of fashion in the 1980s – initiated an unremitting range of expert inquiries and reports into how the BBC performs, what it costs, and what its scope and scale ought to be. A national institution dealing with political change, new market conditions, technological innovation and socio-cultural transformations, has a sinuous path to tread. It must confound its competitors and also please its various ‘stakeholders’ – the government in power and the political class

generally coming top of the list – while pursuing its own organisational logic. One result of this continual tacking to the prevailing political wind – while retaining a lively sense of its own interest and continually renegotiated autonomy – means that the BBC is endemically highly sensitive to ideological change.

The BBC's trajectory may be seen as involving periodic shifts of orientation for which legitimising discourses need to be produced. Given the anxious quotidian scanning of the horizons for auguries, change has to be interpreted, internally mediated and externally justified. Here, the role of the BBC's director-general (DG) and top management is of central importance. The relationship of the BBC's chief executive to the Chairman of the Board of Governors has been of pivotal importance for the DG's survival at times of crisis. In January 2007, following political, media and regulatory dissatisfaction with the traditional arrangement as a check on management, the BBC's governance changed and the Governors were replaced with the BBC Trust. This quasi-regulatory set-up has sought to establish some critical distance from management, but not to everyone's satisfaction (Fowler 2009).

The epigraphs to this article dramatise a relatively recent – and widely reported - clash of managerial styles in the BBC. The protagonists, John Birt and Greg Dyke, first worked together in the late seventies as close colleagues in London Weekend Television's (LWT) celebrated current affairs programme, *Weekend World*, which has been described as 'an unofficial Labour think-tank' (Horrie and Clarke 2000: 246). One of New Labour's architects, Peter Mandelson, worked for the programme. So did Barry Cox, subsequently highly influential as a media executive and policy adviser close to the party leadership. Birt was the senior figure in LWT, then a mainstay of the commercial ITV network. The two men's careers then diverged with Dyke occupying a range of senior executive roles in other commercial television companies. However, when Birt was appointed deputy director-general (DDG) of the BBC in March 1987, Dyke became his successor at LWT the following month (Horrie and Clarke 2000). And then, when Birt's time at the BBC drew to a close, Dyke was appointed to succeed him in June 1999, finally (after a spell as DDG) taking up the post in January 2000. Dyke (2004: 143-144; cf. Wyatt 2003: ch.1)

has recounted the incumbent's efforts to scupper his candidacy for the BBC's top job. and has rejecting Birt's (2002: 498-501) contrary claims.

Much has been made of the two men's vastly different personalities and social skills: Birt's cerebral, calculating coolness is often counterposed to Dyke's intuitive, risk-taking ebullience. Attention has focused most on how such character traits are ostensibly reflected in management styles. What has been ignored, however, is Birt and Dyke shared commitment to *management* Both justified their diverse reshaping of the BBC by claiming that they were changing structures to sustain 'creativity'.

This article is not concerned with defining or characterising 'creativity'. It aims to show how 'creativity' is used to legitimise managerial strategies. It is with this in mind that this account that the contrasting styles of DGs Birt and Dyke are explored.

The good, the bad and the creative

In *Uncertain Vision*, her magnum opus on the BBC from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, Georgina Born (2004) has documented some of the corporation's shifts in ideological content and register in considerable detail. The neo-liberal economic policies instituted by Margaret Thatcher's governments, and maintained by her successor, John Major, produced an organisational echo inside the BBC.

Under John Birt as DDG (1987-1992) and then as DG (1992-2000), the prevailing entrepreneurial and privatising currents were translated into organisational change. These have been widely discussed and are central to Born's anatomy of Birtism. The introduction of 'Producer Choice', the BBC's internal quasi-market, with its accompanying management systems separating Production from Broadcast and the imposition of 'bimediality' on radio and television production epitomised the BBC's adaptation to the ruling market theology and prevailing management theory invoked to transform public services' cost-effectiveness. The new system was preceded by failed McKinsey-inspired reforms in the 1970s. It was a survivor of this era, Michael Checkland, Birt's predecessor as DG, who first cleared the ground for Producer Choice

(Wegg-Prosser 2001: 11-11). Birt's subsequent managerial revolution introduced performance measurement systems and professionalized aspects of management, used consultants extensively and underlined the importance of accountability (Kanter and Raymond 2003a: 6-7).

Born criticises what she terms the BBC's 'new model managerialism' under Birt, whose regime she sees as inimical to creativity in production and as embodying the audit culture anatomised by Michael Power (1997). But whatever the shortcomings of Birtism, and the resentments and demoralisation that this style of management engendered, Birt found a survival strategy for the BBC in tough times. He ensured renewal of the BBC Charter in 1996 and, as Born (2004: 466) herself accepts, astutely recognised the profound importance of digitisation, giving the BBC a head start in developing its online presence, now such a core feature of the corporation's output. Birt, an unpopular manager, achieved a major restructuring of the BBC, secured a reasonable financial settlement in the teeth of political hostility during late Thatcherism, and ensured that the corporation was equipped to deal competitively with the digital age.

Born focuses most on Birt's negative impact on the BBC's organisational culture and strategies. She also considers the role of his successor, Greg Dyke. Summing up, Born (2004: 6) writes 'that Birtist management was responsible for eroding the BBC's creativity...Dyke's changes made the BBC less inhibited and more risk-taking, including in its dealings with the government.' Born's (2004: 71) argues that management must 'achieve the optimal form of integration to serve evolving creative and normative goals'. While creativity is often invoked as a quality or attribute in her study, it is nowhere defined. Instead, Born addresses the 'conditions for creativity'. These depend on a 'creative ecology' whose two key elements are first, giving producers sufficient autonomy 'to exceed and confound the expectations of audiences' and second, the existence of a public service broadcasting (PSB) system in which the BBC has a very significant presence (Born 2004: 244; 495). This stance combines two elements that are contingently related. First, a romantic conception of artistic freedom, which in Negus and Pickering's (2004: 58) words 'is portrayed as constantly in danger of being shackled by

institutions, bureaucratic and economic monoliths'. Second, the view that a big BBC is needed to keep PSB honest. This question of the corporation's scope and scale is contentious and even the BBC's strongest advocates must consider how this case is argued under changing circumstances.

After a lengthy analysis of Birtism's effects on the corporate culture of the BBC that decries the rise of quasi-entrepreneurship, irrationalities in the functioning of the internal quasi-market, the casualisation of employment and a breakdown in trust, Born (2004: 495) concludes that Birt's managerial style was 'destructive of the space and climate for creativity'.

With Dyke the counterpoint to Birt, Born's account may be read as a tale of hero and villain, of fall and road to redemption. Dyke's strategy, she argues, took 'in both organisational and programming change *in the service of creativity*; he saw that the two were inextricably linked' (Born 2004: 468; author's emphasis). But as our epigraph shows, that is precisely what Birt himself claimed to be doing.

Compared to Birt's thirteen years at the BBC in the two top posts, Dyke's four-year tenure was far shorter-lived than he wished as he fell victim to a putsch by the BBC's Governors. The story has been widely aired elsewhere –not least in Dyke's own autobiography. After the BBC aired a 'two-way' discussion on its agenda-setting *Today Programme* with its defence correspondent, Andrew Gilligan, critical of the government's lack of probity in handling intelligence information about the existence of 'weapons of mass destruction' in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, a major crisis ensued. Tony Blair's government took up the cudgels against the BBC, which was accused of shoddy journalism. While the essence of the story was true, the BBC had left itself open to attack, amongst other things, because of the relatively informal 'two-way' in question (Montgomery 2006). Gilligan's report was followed by the death (apparently by suicide) of his source, Dr David Kelly, who was 'outed' to the media by government sources. The ensuing scandal led to an inquiry by a judge appointed by the government, Lord Hutton. The Hutton Inquiry found that fault lay with the BBC, precipitating the resignation of

Gavyn Davies, the BBC's Chairman, who had hoped to shield Dyke by stepping down himself. Dyke was forced to 'resign' by moves against him by the Acting Chairman and other members of the BBC Governors (Born 2004: 455-465; Dyke, 2004: 250-286; Hutton, 2004).

Mobilising the creatives

Before being forced out, Dyke initiated a major attempt to change the BBC's corporate culture. In a notable speech to the BBC's staff on first becoming director-general, he declared:

'In the nineties, believe it or not, one of the stated aims of the BBC was "to be the best-managed organisation in the public sector." I have to admit that wouldn't have got me out of the bed in the morning...So let me offer you a new vision. *We want the BBC to become the most creative organisation in the world, and I don't just mean in the production and programme areas, I mean right across the BBC, everywhere....*' (Dyke 2002: 6; emphases added).

Dyke counterposed his vision of 'creativity' as the BBC's *defining* characteristic to Birt's mere 'effective management'. Making creativity the central focus of his managerial style was smart PR. Dyke rhetorically established his organisational changes as the servants of creativity. This conveniently buried Birt's identical contention that this too had been his aim and that his reforms had ensured the BBC was '*the world's most creative and trusted broadcaster*'. This phrase appeared in a BBC 'vision statement' as early as 1998. Creativity (defined as innovative programme-making) was seen as the BBC's 'core competence' (Küng-Shankleman 2000: 97, 103), in line with long-established tradition.

Born considers in some detail Dyke's new strategy for the BBC. Although creativity is identified as essential for understanding the BBC's purposes, Born's account does not consider how Dyke used it as a mobilising focus. Nor does her discussion address the internal 'culture change' that the creative turn was meant to produce. To be fair, in an already substantial work, Born could do only so much. However, it is a significant

omission, because it underplays Dyke's own commitment to a distinctive and interventionist managerial style that emphasised leadership.

First, at the macro level, Dyke's approach should be related to New Labour's drive to make 'creativity' a modernising force in the UK's economy. His canny projection of the BBC as a *creative organisation* was completely consonant with what since 1998 had become reigning doctrine. This is not surprising as Dyke – until his break with the New Labour government over his ousting as DG – was a Labour supporter and financial backer, closely linked to the Blairite inner circle and open to its ideological currents. He had considerable common ground with John Birt, who on leaving the BBC became a special adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair. Like Blair and Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of Exchequer, Dyke was also alert to American influences, trends and models. Horrie and Clarke (2000: 245, 247) have commented that '*Weekend World* was determinedly "Atlanticist", taking its agenda from the US Democratic Party'. In addition, the New Labour project was also influenced by 'the LWT house-style addiction to audience and market research, demographics and focus groups. Birt had pioneered modern (American-derived) audience research, and understanding the importance of audience research had been one of the first lessons Dyke had learned as an LWT executive.'

From early in office, New Labour pursued a 'creative industries' policy. Although a somewhat stop-go approach to actual policy-making, whatever its discontinuities, it has been a leitmotiv of government thinking and the source of numerous reports and widespread dissemination by the thinktankerati and media commentators. Developments from the first, highly influential delineation of the creative industries in 1998 to the largely abortive attempt in 2008 to devise a more fundamental 'creative economy' policy have been documented elsewhere (Schlesinger 2007; 2009). Worth noting, though, is that when Dyke took over the helm at the BBC, the discourse of creativity was omnipresent. While creative industries were not a key focus of the corporation's policy machinery, they had not gone unnoticed. When Dyke sought to inspire the BBC's workforce in 2000 by insisting that 'creativity' existed throughout the corporation – and not just among the

production staff traditionally regarded as ‘creatives’ - he was articulating ideas about organisations then circulating widely (e.g. Robinson 2001). The idea that ‘creative businesses are creative throughout’ – precisely Dyke’s view - was a mantra found in the widely touted *Cox Review of Creativity in Business* (Cox 2005); two years after Dyke’s departure, Cox’s nostrum crystallised for general consumption what was already in wide currency when Dyke was DG.

Second, at the micro level, Born’s study is critical of the impact of Birt’s management thinking in the BBC. She labels it ‘new public management’. Although Dyke is identified as an organisational change agent, Born ignores the extent to which he *also* favoured management theory and used it to engage and mobilise his troops under the label of creativity.

Dyke’s guru was John Kotter, a management professor at Harvard. His beliefs about management, however, partly pre-dated his Harvard immersion. Recalling his days running LWT’s *Six O’Clock Show*, Dyke remarked: ‘Most of what I actually believe about management comes out of that experience, out of actually understanding *the way to run things is with small teams, and involve everybody.*’ Whereas at Harvard he ‘discovered that *leadership is more important than management of companies.* Management of companies is not difficult, but leading them is’ (Grout and Curry: 1998: 27, 63; emphases added). This highly questionable view stresses the attributes of personality over attention to process.

Dyke’s espousal of personalised team leadership and staff ‘involvement’ (or mobilisation) was in keeping with broad trends in management theory analysed by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 75; emphasis added) who argue that during the 1990s a new style of ‘neo-management’ thinking became *à la mode* in line with ‘globalisation’, lean firms and post-Fordism: ‘All the self-organized, creative beings on whom performance now depends must be guided in a direction decided by only a few, but without reverting to the “hierarchical bosses” of yesteryear. *This is where leaders and their visions come into the picture.*’ At the centre of leaders’ strategies is the task of

mobilising their work forces. Neo-management is characterised by ‘criteria of personality and the use of personal relations’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 85). In the transforming work order ‘creativity, reactivity and flexibility are the new watchwords’. Hence, ‘neo-management aims to respond to demands for authenticity and freedom, which have historically been articulated in interrelated fashion by what we have called the “artistic critique”’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 97). It is that selfsame critique of Birtism that Born articulates; Birtism’s negation is largely identified with Dyke’s practice. However, Born does not identify this as a neo-managerial style in itself.

Dyke invoked a distinctive rhetoric and unleashed a far-reaching culture change strategy. The villain-hero dichotomy of Born’s account captures the shift in mood and culture inside the BBC after Birt. However, it understates the continuing centrality of *managerialism* under Dyke for shaping how public service broadcasting is delivered in the 21st century. Dyke’s pursuit of culture change faced inward (undoing what he saw as the damaging parts of Birt’s legacy) and also outward (positioning the BBC for the renewal of its Charter in 2006).

Creativity and ‘culture change’

Dyke’s approach to transforming the mood music at the BBC has become the stuff of - if not quite legend – several case studies in management practice. It has been characterised as ‘management for change’ (Aris and Bughin 2005) and also as combining ‘transformational’ and ‘charismatic’ leadership styles - although ultimately without sustainable impact (Küng 2008). Dyke (and several key colleagues) collaborated extensively with the fullest account, produced by Rosabeth Moss Kanter at the Harvard Business School (Dyke 2005: 220). In a nice irony, Dyke had been sent on HBS’s Advanced Management Program in autumn 1989 by LWT as John Birt had originally been booked to go but had already departed to the BBC. Dyke (2005: 106) subsequently commented: ‘I was probably the first leader of an ITV company to go to a business school. Many people in British television ridiculed me for it, but it was the first sign that British television was turning into a real business run by people who took business

seriously...Those twelve weeks I spent at Harvard were as exciting a period as I've spent anywhere.'

Dyke's attempt to transform the corporation received considerable attention outside the BBC as well as being regularly reported in the corporation's in-house journal *Ariel* and widely disseminated by those most closely involved in delivering the programme. Aside from using such documentation, our research also involved interviews with senior BBC executives who participated in the culture change process.

'One BBC'

When Dyke took over the BBC, 'he had worked hard to keep the momentum going behind an aggressive change program' (Kanter and Raymond, 2003a: 1). The first move came in April 2000, with the 'One BBC' reorganisation. This set out to undo the split between Broadcast and Production, and to reduce the BBC's overhead from 24% of income to 15% over five years, freeing £200 million a year for programmes. Dyke removed a level of management and engaged in rationalising support services. He also reduced the layers of management and restructured the divisions, bringing more programme makers and broadcasters into the Executive Committee than before – building a large team at the centre of the organisation but on different principles from Birt's Corporate Centre, which was scrapped along with the Policy and Planning Units. Dyke tried to encourage a mood of risk-taking and dramatically reduced expenditure on consultants. He also took steps to improve local radio funding and outreach to the audience and in October 2000 audaciously moved the *Nine O'Clock News* to occupy the 10pm slot ill-advisedly vacated by ITV (and subsequently reinstated by BBC1's main terrestrial competitor). Dyke also engaged in some 'feel good' acts, such as improving in-house facilities. The early measures of success of One BBC were increased audience satisfaction, £270 million spent on new programmes, the BBC1's unprecedented win in the ratings war against ITV in July 2001 and advances in the corporation's digital strategy (Born 2004: ch.10; Kanter and Raymond 2003a: 8-12).

One BBC: Making it Happen

Dyke favoured an open style of communication and minimal formality, interacting with staff in an expressive way that contrasted greatly with Birt's stand-offishness. This made him very popular indeed as the public protests by staff when Dyke was forced out demonstrated. In a barely veiled snipe at his predecessor, Dyke noted that at Harvard he discovered that rather than be tough, 'the most successful organizations in the world were those that treated their staff properly...When I turned up at the BBC a decade later I was amazed to find that the old view of management still persisted' (Dyke 2005: 107).

However, internal surveys in 2001 revealed a continuing malaise, with many divisions and disaffections inside the corporation. Some senior executives were for a decisive culture change. A key precursor of this shift came with a report to the BBC's Executive Committee in November 2001 by a group of top managers who had visited 'innovative' companies in the USA such as Cisco Systems, Southwest Airlines, SRI, The Container Store, Delancey Street, Ritz Carlton and IDEO (Kanter and Raymond 2003a: 15). They returned from the USA convinced of the need to transform how the BBC worked. Dyke and his colleagues agreed that they needed to 'develop a culture that would support creativity and collaboration' and to 'focus on valuing people and bottom-up change' (Kanter and Raymond 2003b: 1). This fitted the precepts of neo-management.

Following Dyke's launch speech at Television Centre on 7 February 2002, the senior executive and programme maker, Susan Spindler, supported by a small team, was appointed to lead the ensuing culture change project. After discussion with other executives, she established seven themes under the continuity-stressing slogan 'One BBC: Making it Happen':

Inspire Creativity Everywhere

Connecting With All Audiences

Valuing People

We are the BBC (development of a new set of BBC values)

Great Spaces (improving the working environment)

Lead More, Manage Less

Just Do It (overcome internal inefficiencies)

The themes were not equal in weight, according to one well-informed insider. The creativity and audience working groups faced outwards, with Charter renewal in mind, whereas the remainder had a supportive role. Each of the seven themes had a leader assigned to it, in some cases prominent BBC figures, along with 18 divisional leaders to take the plan forward in their parts of the corporation. In early 2002, the ‘theme leaders’ joined Dyke and a party of senior executives for another trip to the USA to learn further about successful organisations’ business cultures. When Dyke launched the new initiative, it was still a sketch, and he did not know how it would work out. He called on his staff to imagine a different future. As one focus was symbolic change, Dyke introduced ‘a yellow card, similar to that used to indicate a penalty in soccer, emblazoned with the words “Cut the Crap: Make it Happen”’ (Kanter and Raymond 2003b: 5). Dyke’s change team had to figure out how to achieve this. Susan Spindler (Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007: 29) has described it as a ‘do-it-yourself’ approach. At no point was the idea of creativity explicitly developed nor was any systematic notion of the relation between creativity and its underlying organisational conditions anywhere formally articulated. The case studies produced by management writers are post hoc reconstructions. It is an open question whether they offer a *model* for change that can be applied elsewhere.

Caroline van den Brul (Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007:44) has described the creativity working group, which set itself the task of improving ‘everyday creativity’ and achieving “‘blockbuster’ innovation’. Two companies considered to be models were the consumer-focused and ethnography-practising design company IDEO, and the team-focused innovation outfit, Stanford Research Institute (SRI). The key message was that cooperation and sharing of ideas should be imported into BBC culture, and that not only individual producers should be regarded as ‘creatives’. Van den Brul noted that ‘improving creativity across the organization was considered crucial to the success of the entire culture change programme’ and was Dyke’s especial concern. However, she also observed that

‘There was no creativity department or area with a special expertise in creativity, so our approach would be seminal. We had discovered in the research that people in the BBC are averse to proscribed (sic) processes for creativity. Many in the BBC at the time held a view that creativity is something one is born with and not something that could be taught or improved. The very suggestion that people not traditionally associated with the creative areas of the BBC could in fact contribute creatively to BBC ideas was an anathema.’ (Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007: 49; emphasis added)

The Making it Happen team set up the Big Brainstorm, a one-day event held at Television Centre and produced like a TV programme, to which 300 staff were invited from across the BBC. As Aris and Bughin (2005: 390) note, such ‘town hall’ meetings are used in other media organisations to produce a ‘common-purpose culture’. According to van den Brul, this method was copied spontaneously around the BBC, resulting in a more rigorous approach to evaluating ideas and developing projects.

Extensive BBC in-house consultations known as ‘Just Imagine’ ran for a 6-month period in 2002, using a technique called ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ (AI). Despite Dyke’s wish to get away from using consultants (a sign of Birtism), the BBC drew on advice from Dr Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge, an outside organizational development specialist (Kanter and Raymond 2003b: 5). Appreciative Inquiry employed ‘structured dialogue to generate a collective image of a new and better future for an organisation. [...] Put simply, you ask people what’s good about their organisation and how it could be made even better, rather than asking them “what’s wrong?”’ (Berrisford 2005: 22). Over 10,000 employees (some 40 percent of the BBC’s staff) took part. Participants were asked to consider three key questions:

1. What has been the most creative/valued experience in your time at the BBC?
2. What were the conditions that made that experience possible?

3. If those experiences were to become the norm, how would the BBC have to change?’ (Berrisford 2005: 24)

Dyke’s strategy was informed by the pragmatic recognition that he needed to reach out to audiences presently under-served by the BBC to win wider public support for the corporation. To that end he needed to harness all of the BBC’s talent to establish common purposes and shared values and make working conditions conducive to a high level of collaboration and engagement. The change process was supported by use of the in-house journal, *Ariel*, which kept up a running commentary on the project, and by a Make it Happen website on which staff could post suggestions for change.

From consultation to ‘new values’

The ‘Just Imagine’ consultation process went through several stages: first came ‘Leading the Way’ in May 2002 for 400 senior executives. According to Susan Spindler (Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007: 35), selling the project to this audience was critical. This was followed by ‘Just Imagine’ workshops, based on AI principles. ‘By July 2002, 5000 BBC members had participated in the Just Imagine process, and by November 2000, 10,000 had taken part.’ Spindler maintained that this involvement by 37% of the workforce had produced a widespread ‘sense of shared ownership of the change agenda’ (Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007: 37). Although the process certainly seems to have generated a few programme ideas, its proponents have offered no evidence of a wholesale transformation in harnessing staff ‘creativity’.

Dyke’s effort to change the mood was helped by ‘a lot of quick wins that were cheap and easy to achieve. They were implemented almost immediately, demonstrating visible engagement with the outputs of the sessions’ (Berrisford 2005: 22). One example was offering a BBC-wide discount on ‘equipment to receive new BBC digital programming’ (Kanter and Raymond 2003b: 5). A range of small-scale initiatives was introduced by the BBC’s divisions in response to staff suggestions. A corporation-level initiative considered especially important was a new employee induction programme, Upfront, piloted in April 2002.

Implementing the culture change programme was not without difficulty. It faced in-house scepticism, a commercial rather than public service culture in BBC Ventures and a distinctive outlook in BBC Worldwide, sniping by the press, and failures to engage by a large section of middle managers. The initiative also involved a major commitment of time by some of the BBC's most senior figures, creating workload problems (Kanter and Raymond 2003b: 9-10).

By December 2002, the Dyke held a second Leading the Way meeting at which he proclaimed the new BBC orientation that had emerged from the process. 'In January 2003, the BBC published a written set of values for the first time in its history. Just Imagine had 'generated about 4,000 comments and suggestions about the values and behaviours of the BBC. These were distilled down to six "core aspirational values":

- Trust is the foundation of the BBC: we are independent, impartial and honest.
- Audiences are at the heart of everything we do.
- We take pride in delivering quality and value for money.
- Creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation.
- We respect each other and celebrate our diversity so that everyone can give their best.
- We are one BBC: great things happen when we work together.'

(Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007: 37)

Spindler (2002: 3) described these as the 'first visible result of the theme teams' work' and as capturing 'the things which the BBC aspires to and cherishes'. Standards of behaviour relating to each of the values were also published.

The Just Imagine process was used to develop a five-year change plan agreed by the BBC's Executive Committee in March 2003. Key focuses were on leadership, performance management, getting closer to audiences and creativity and innovation.

(Spindler and van den Brul 2006-2007: 38-39). Dyke announced the plans in an internally televised live event called the Big Conversation in May 2003.

What did all this activity add up to in terms of actually embedding Born's 'ecology of creativity' inside the BBC? Even the sympathetic Kanter and Raymond (2003b: 11; emphases added) note tellingly that '*it was difficult to show the connection between Making it Happen efforts and success with audiences*' and that most top executives agreed that '*it would be difficult to know when the culture had really changed for the better*'. The evidence presented by Spindler and van den Brul's account concerns reported changes in attitude and belief and an increased willingness to participate in staff surveys. My interviews illustrate the sense of change that the new regime engendered. As one senior executive put it:

'The bouncy Mr Dyke gave phenomenal encouragement to programme makers. He threw the windows open. It was an easy hit. There was the notion that all could contribute, that your contribution would find its way through the system...There were vast rallies of people from all over the country who came to put their ideas on the table. It got beyond the cynicism that normally attended these things. It was more than mood music.'

Another executive, returning to the BBC in 2000 after a long absence, found that

'What was new was the right to fail, risk taking, innovation and change. So far as Greg was concerned, it was OK to fail if your intentions were right. It felt liberating at the time – there was a sense of purpose, mission...The organisation opened up a bit more. The process was about how the organisation would like people to behave; there were no big structural changes. Making It Happen was partly about cheering people up. There was a sense of empowering people to get strong. Dyke did have some measurable targets: reduce overheads and increase the spend on programmes.'

But culture change can be fragile. Spindler and van den Brul (2006-2007: 43, emphasis added) note that 'Making it Happen was abandoned shortly after the abrupt departure of

Greg Dyke...*The momentum for changing the culture [...] was lost. However, the creativity and audiences initiatives [...] survive the transition to a different regime*'. - The precise nature of this survival is surely a matter for in-depth research rather than assertion. Although by all accounts Dyke was able to rally the staff by using cultural mobilisation, the evidence of a far-reaching restructuring of the BBC under his DGship is less apparent and the BBC remains in many respects the legatee of Birt's reviled reforms.

While creativity has continued to figure as an official 'purpose' of the BBC, this has overwhelmingly been framed by Dyke's successor, Mark Thompson, in terms of realising 'public value' (an initiative launched under Dyke), which has aimed to show that the licence fee income is being well spent (BBC 2004). Selling the BBC's 'public purposes' has been a major feature of the post-Dyke period and since his departure, whereas the internal mobilising rhetoric vanished the outward-facing aspects were retained. Post-Dyke, the BBC continued to engage in a *pas de deux* with the UK government over creativity. In the wake of a Green Paper that described the BBC's licence fee as 'venture capital for creative production' (DCMS 2005: 7), the corporation proclaimed its 'window of creative competition' (WOCC) which further opened up its commissioning to independents, and launched 'Creative Future', 'its new editorial blueprint'. The BBC needs a creative response to the amazing bewildering, exciting and inspiring changes in both technology and expectations', proclaimed Mark Thompson (BBC 2006: 1-2).

BBC Leadership Programme

Dyke's autobiography conveys a strong sense of how leadership should be conducted. Unsurprisingly, therefore, one initiative arising from Making it Happen was the launch of the BBC's new leadership development programme in September 2003. Ashridge Business School, with which the BBC had a long connection, was selected as the training partner in December 2002.

The new BBC Leadership Programme replaced the more than 50 existing programmes across the BBC. Dyke's culture change initiative led to a common framework with some '1,500 leaders going through the programme a year' (Katz 2005: 2). The Programme was

obligatory for anyone who managed three or more people (Kent 2004). It set out to develop core leadership skills, including strategic thinking and decision making, establishing direction and focus, effective communication, giving feedback, coaching others and working collaboratively, using a range of techniques from face-to-face coaching to online delivery. Courses stretched over a six-month period with leaders divided into 'pathways' according to whether they were senior, established (middle management) or team (junior managerial roles). On concluding their pathways, participants returned to 'share' their learning. They could volunteer to become 'coaches', 'action learning facilitators' or 'mentors' for future programmes.

All 'graduates' of the BBC Leadership Programme filled in online evaluation forms after each module. According to the BBC's internal evaluation, there was overwhelming satisfaction with the experience, although it was acknowledged that some employees remained sceptical about its benefits (Kent 2004).

Louise Katz (2005: 3) of BBC Training and Development concluded that:

'The true impact of the Leadership Programme will not be known for some time as culture change is a long-term initiative. However the evaluation model we have developed makes us able to continuously develop our programme and monitor improvements both on an individual and organisational level.'

Our evaluation process shows that 92 per cent of participants have increased their confidence as leaders and 100 per cent have transferred some of their learning back into the organisation. Qualitative evaluation with programme delegates is beginning to demonstrate changes in approach and behaviour that are in turn affecting team performance, creativity and higher levels of overall trust.'

This assessment combined the upbeat with the cautious. While Katz pointed to the transmission of 'learning', she also duly recognized the long-term view needed when seeking culture change. Her generally positive account of the Leadership Programme was countered by views expressed in our own interviews. One participant remarked:

‘For a creative organization to put everyone through the same filter – you’d clone your management thinking. It’s better to send people to half a dozen places. I didn’t learn a great deal. It wasn’t selective. Everyone above the rank of sergeant had to go to Ashridge.’

Another informant had ‘avoided’ the Leadership Programme. ‘It generated cynicism, unlike Making it Happen. It wasn’t delivering sustainable change.’ This individual had attended the SRI programme which ‘had been transforming for me. It cleared your thinking. It was re-energising – how to make ideas and organization work.’

The contrast drawn between Making It Happen and the Leadership Programme raises questions about the success of one key part of Dyke’s reforms. . Without suggesting bad faith, the BBC’s in-house analyses are inherently suspect. First, we could not reasonably expect complete critical detachment of the corporation’s researchers, who were dealing with a flagship HR project, nor indeed could we expect the engineers of Making it Happen to consider it anything but a success. Second, some BBC staff responding to the surveys might be assumed to act on the cautionary principle of not believing that their views would be anonymous, whatever the reassurances offered.

One senior executive, involved in a work group, and an enthusiastic Dyke supporter, was positive about the encouragement given to programme-makers but did not think that ‘major corporate change’ was carried through. ‘People felt better about themselves; they had more understanding of audience needs; there was a huge growth of marketing in the BBC – the marketers became the gurus.’ Our informant considered that in the end the approach was ‘fantastically inward looking. It was another version of the same thing: it felt more purposeful but it didn’t deliver cultural change and it hit the buffers with the Kelly affair. It was impossible to achieve’. Another senior executive, also involved in a work group, thought that although the ideas were supposed to come from the ground up, ‘Dyke knew the answers before he asked the questions. The process was about buy-in’. Both sources considered the process costly and rather unstructured and that the issue was much more about how staff viewed and felt about the organisation after John Birt’s departure than actually effecting major structural change. They also concurred in thinking

that after Dyke himself had left the BBC the process had 'hit the buffers'. Such views are not conclusive, of course. But they do give us pause for thought amidst the hype.

Conclusions

The management of creative work constitutes a recurrent problem for organisational strategies. Current research underlines the inherent tensions between 'creatives' and strategic managers. It also focuses particularly on how work processes might be structured to 'incorporate employee autonomy and creativity' (Davis and Scase 2000: viii). It was on precisely this terrain that both Birt and Dyke pursued different strategies, each of which was proclaimed as liberating creativity. Whereas Birt's approach was quasi-market oriented and Dyke's 'neo-managerial', each DG flew the protean flag of creative management. Creativity, it has been argued, may be diversely defined and shaped by quite different managerial practices over time. While specific conditions come into play in the case of the BBC, the argument presented here has broader implications for our understanding of creative management strategies. It is a particular instance of the general contention that the 'businesses involved in cultural production don't possess any single set of criteria or uniform guidelines for harnessing creative practices to the requirements of their owners and shareholders' (Negus and Pickering 2004: 48).

From the very start, the BBC has been a 'creative organisation' in the specific sense that it has operated as an infrastructure to sustain the recruitment of talent to effect the origination of programmes and formats, to implement their scheduling and ensure their distribution. In the increasingly competitive context of British broadcasting since the 1990s, administrative and financial concerns have taken centre stage with the result that marketing considerations have increasingly entered 'the conception stage of cultural production' (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 195).

But this kind of encroachment is not new, even if the conditions under which it occurs are particular. As Tom Burns (1977: 217) noted more than three decades ago, relations between management and 'the creative workers' in the BBC had been subject to 'wide swoops between opposite principles of organisational construction' ever since the 1930s.

Creativity, however, had not usually been a key principle used to legitimise and mobilise the corporation's staff as a whole but had instead been counterposed to administration or management. Dyke's short-lived managerial innovation lay in ostensibly democratising creativity and marketing that idea internally. In a more minor key, creativity was also presented (along with efficiency) as a major rationale for Birt's managerial reforms. Although the term really came into its own during Dyke's leadership-driven cultural change, even then it was still directly linked to making the BBC a more effective – and *competitive* – player. Dyke's mobilising appeal to the entire workforce to think of itself as creative fitted into broadly contemporaneous shifts in neo-management theory outlined by Boltanski and Chiapello as well as the policy thinking that underpinned New Labour's creative turn. Dyke's manifesto for change clearly depended on his distinctive approach to management and leadership but, at the same time, in ideological terms it resonated strongly with dominant ideas in the domain of public policy. That said, although Dyke's project might have appeared to depend on New Labour's policy turn, its deep elective affinity aside, there is no evidence of a direct influence. Yet the espousal of creativity was not coincidental. It was intended to carry a mobilising charge both in the organisation and in the wider policy world.

Since Dyke's departure, creativity has continued to shape the BBC's official discourse. Mark Thompson, the BBC's next DG, has kept up the rhetoric in the corporate strategy now labelled Creative Future. Moreover, as the BBC's public purposes have been revised and increasingly formalised in the era of the BBC Trust, creativity has become one of its six fundamental principles (BBC Trust 2007).

This analysis of the role of creativity in BBC managerial styles has revealed a blind spot in an orthodox account of change in the BBC from late Thatcherism to New Labourism, which is so well illustrated by the work of Georgina Born. As has been shown, Dyke was as much driven by ideas about management as Birt (the two also shared Atlanticism and New Labour sympathies). Dyke's implementation of culture change and his belief in the leadership principle were central to his efforts to shape what Born has called a 'creative ecology'. Dyke sought to repair what Sennett (2006: 63) has termed the 'deficits of

structural change’, namely ‘low institutional loyalty, diminishment of informal trust among workers, and weakening of institutional knowledge.’

However, there is no independent assessment of the effects of this much-lauded approach. In ‘Making It Happen’, did Dyke develop a reproducible model for change? The BBC’s internal assessments and sympathetic management case studies strongly suggest that his programme produced a great deal of activity, contributed to a widespread change of mood, and engineered re-engagement by many disaffected staff. But there is no clear evidence that the culture change was durable enough to withstand Dyke’s departure. Since then, the BBC has needed to navigate through the regular crises that have beset his successor’s attempt to map the BBC’s Creative Future, and which – at this time of writing – have left it particularly exposed as the publicly-funded survivor of a terrestrial broadcasting system on the brink of a radical overhaul.

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