

Building Resilient Cultural Organisations: Insights from the Business World

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With transformation as the buzzword for economic and social sectors around the world, what does it mean for culture, particularly in Singapore? Tarun Pardal looks at the shared challenges faced by enterprises everywhere, and points to lessons that arts and heritage organisations can draw from the business world.

In our rapidly evolving cultural landscape, one notable trend is how organisations and their leaders are taking more active roles in supporting social innovation, inclusion and diversity. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has also published research on how expressions of human creativity can serve as a force for social change.

At the same time, technology is forcing the physical world into a virtual one. New content development platforms are evolving, with creative boundaries being pushed. Younger artists are looking closer to home for inspiration, exploring the local and traditional, and moving away from predominantly western ideas and expressions. Simultaneously, our measurement of value has evolved, with attention as the new currency. With ever-depleting attention spans, “bite-sized” content on digital platforms like TikTok and Blinkit seems the order of the day. Given society’s wide array of competing forms of entertainment from television and gaming to social media, there is a need for serious retrospection and creative reinvention.

Supporting the Sector in its Transformation Journey

Without doubt, the global pandemic COVID-19 dealt a colossal blow to the arts and cultural sector. One statistic from the National Arts Council starkly illustrates this: there was more than a 50% decline in the number of ticketed and non-ticketed performances in 2020 compared to 2019. The number of art and cultural entities also shrank by 20% from pre-COVID levels.

But as Minister of Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong reminded us at 2021’s Patron of the Arts award, the arts and culture in Singapore have come a long way over the past few decades, and have demonstrated extreme resilience. He highlighted the role played by the arts as an anchor for our distinctive Singaporean identity, and spoke of how it fosters cross-generational linkages to our heritage. He underscored the need to do more for arts and culture entities to thrive in the future economy, and how this will only happen once the economics behind the initiatives are viable.

To this end, the National Arts Council (NAC) and National Heritage Board (NHB) have been playing the role of sector champions, helping their respective sectors level up their capabilities through the provision of grants and other support to smaller organisations and keeping an eye on the wider ecosystem. But I believe we will also need sophisticated value chains, such as those in other global cultural hubs. While the ecosystem is amply supported by funding from the government as well as from organisations such as Tote Board and Temasek Trust, there is also the need for philanthropic

Front Office Capabilities	Middle Office Capabilities	Back Office Capabilities
Outreach Management	Product Management	Human Resources
Ticketing/Booking	Operations/Logistics Planning	Finance Including Taxation
Mobile/Web Content Management	Customer Analytics	Procurement
Feedback Management	Ecosystem Partnership Management, Funding Management	Legal

Figure 1. Key capabilities in arts organisations across the front office, middle office and back office.

support from individual patrons. We also need audiences and arts lovers who are willing to pay for arts consumption. This is all part of a thriving, competitive landscape.

Even with the wide variety of support available, the critical question is whether these organisations possess the relevant capabilities to successfully execute the requisite transformation. I recognise the unique diversity of the arts landscape which includes small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), charities including Institutions of a Public Character (IPCs), and many freelancers. But, as with business entities in a range of sectors, arts SMEs and charities need to think about new ways of augmenting digital and/or business capabilities within their organisation. An easy way to think about this is to look at these capabilities in arts organisations across the front office, middle office and back office. Some of the key capabilities are provided in the framework here. (Fig. 1)

For each of these capabilities, it is useful to apply the 4Bs framework. The 4Bs stand for **Build, Buy, Borrow** or **Bot**. Organisations need to consider the significance of each of these capabilities. They can take a strategic decision to either invest in building their own capability when it is more critical to their

business success, or borrow/outsourse the ones that are considered less critical or when the organisations may not have the right resources/skills to enable this capability.

For example, a number of organisations are borrowing some back office capabilities by centralising their operations in a Shared Service Centre such as for payroll management, procurement, legal services etc. There is also an option to bot, that is, to automate some of these capabilities. In the case of feedback collection, there can be an automated step wherein a third-party tool can be used to collect and analyse customer feedback in an automated manner on a periodic basis.

In addition, it is sensible for organisations to also take note of some new trends observed globally. Here, I have outlined some significant trends which I believe will impact the arts and culture ecosystem.

1. Innovation in enhanced pervasiveness of arts and culture

The art and cultural sector is moving away from traditional spaces of arts consumption such as art galleries, museums, concert halls and theatres. Many arts organisations

have been reflecting on how to innovate to make the arts and culture more accessible to audiences. A great example of this is National Gallery Singapore's 2022 launch of a Non Fungible Token (NFT)-redeemable machine outside its premises. The Gallery has also increased the accessibility of art to the public by placing QR codes at HDB void decks, an initiative that brings art to communities in the heartlands.

Even in public transit, SMRT trains have become a mode of staging art for the general public. A new initiative to promote local artists by playing their music on trains and platforms for commuters has been welcomed by artists and music lovers. Working with SMRT has also allowed the National Arts Council to expand the platform on which buskers with disabilities showcase their talents.

At a global level, digital music streaming services such as Spotify, Apple Music and Amazon Music offer new platforms for upcoming musicians to launch their music for a wider audience. These allow users to provide feedback on, like and share music, as well as subscribe to artists in order to have access to their future releases, thus enabling artists to build long-term fan bases. At the same time, music artists will need to learn how to leverage the data provided by these services, and understand both revenue distribution and algorithmic influence in the streaming economy.

2. Generative AI

The advent of Generative AI will no doubt bring a new set of both challenges and

opportunities. Gen-AI, as it is referred to in shorthand, can produce increasingly sophisticated art, video, and music based on prompts. The output produced will become more indistinguishable from human work as technological capabilities evolve. Artists will need to continue to demonstrate skill and value that is clearly distinguishable from digital art, while simultaneously warding off the threats posed by deep fakes and other potential scams.

There is, however, also tremendous opportunity. Gen AI can be used to augment human capability where necessary, while also reducing operating costs for arts organisations. For example, compared to sourcing marketing artwork and copywriting from a commercial agency, Gen AI can produce this at a fraction of the cost with the same level of impact. The challenges faced by the arts and cultural sector related to talent shortages are pervasive across other sectors as well. Hence, the need to look at AI for workforce augmentation is critical. As an example, AI can be used to support many human resource functions such as the screening and shortlisting of curriculum vitae and the scheduling of interviews. Similar examples exist with many other back office and front office functions, with more use cases coming up almost every other day. Specific to the cultural sector, could AI be adapted for audition calls or the more efficient documentation of heritage artefacts and art pieces?

3. New Monetisation Models

The number of digital platforms available to showcase art and culture is growing every day. Audience reach for any art form is no

longer limited by proximity and physical accessibility. The number of followers, views and hits on digital platforms has turned out to be more than just lead generation for physical performances and paid downloads, they have become monetisable in themselves, generating revenue through linked advertisements and royalties.

Other monetisation models available to artists include the sale of NFTs that allows the transfer of the ownership of the digital product with the use of Blockchain Technology. Another form of monetisation is the creation of digital workshops or learning courses which can be hosted on paid learning platforms. There are also subscription platforms such as Patreon and Substack that reward loyalty with exclusive content and other tiered membership benefits.

Conclusion

Singapore's art and cultural growth story is on the right path. However, the headwinds coming out of COVID-19 pandemic still need to be navigated. Singapore's two national plans Our SG Arts Plan and Our SG Heritage Plan remind us that the success of a sustainable cultural ecosystem is determined not just by the quality of artists and their works or the viability of the heritage business, but also by how the cultural content succeeds in connecting with and growing their audiences at home and abroad.

To ensure the long-term vibrancy of the arts and heritage sectors in Singapore, lessons from the

broader SME landscape can be adapted. I have developed the acronym **ACT** to suggest some areas of focus moving forward:

Accessible

To build new audiences, could artists and arts groups blend arts and culture into other pervasive forms whether print, television, internet or the metaverse? There are new opportunities to collaborate with established digital and physical platforms and ecosystem partners, and arts organisations can leverage their customer bases to increase outreach and patronship. Could there be further reflection on what makes us unique and where the arts can add value in strengthening social cohesion and family ties? There is potential to create greater social impact through art and culture which may be under-tapped.

Condensed

Could we refine how art and culture are consumed? How do we make art/music more "bite-sized" to appeal to a younger generation that has a limited "attention" span? Perhaps artists and organisations should consider how an Instagram reel or Tik-Tok video suffice can deliver attractive artistic content? Do we also need to explore new forms of loyalty and subscription models for audiences to be engaged in a more sustained manner?

Transformative

Having a digital backbone levels the playing field between those with financial means and those without, and the Singapore government has introduced multiple initiatives and grants to help SMEs transform their front office, back office and middle office. How can art organisations leverage the host of digital capabilities available? How can

they better tap on the wider ecosystem to enable new ways of showcasing artists' talent and expanding their outreach?

Buttressed by the continued resilience demonstrated in the recovery from COVID-19, the long-term prospects of the sector look promising. With a focus on digital innovation as well as support from the larger business and social ecosystem, I am confident that Singapore's vibrant arts and culture can become an integral part of everyone's lives, and will be welcomed resoundingly on the global stage. □

About the Author



Tarun Pardal is a Managing Director at Accenture Singapore. He has more than 20 years of work experience, of which more than 14 years have been with Singapore's public service agencies in social services, community development, learning and education. As a consulting practitioner, he has successfully led and delivered key transformational work for his clients across multiple projects. He is also responsible for bringing the latest innovations to his clients in areas such as Web 3.0 and Generative AI. He is most passionate about defining citizen experiences in the digital era and the future of work for public service. He has also been actively involved in advising several social service agencies and philanthropic organisations on their digital transformation initiatives.

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