

Peer Learning Leadership Working Group Report

Introduction

In 2012, PACT partnered with the American Folklore Society (AFS) to develop a highly successful series of “Leadership, Succession, and Transition Planning” workshops at the New Orleans annual meeting. Folklorists representing organizations and communities from across the nation participated in a multi-day conversation about pressing issues in the field, ultimately generating a report on the multi-day workshop’s findings (Morales, et al: 2013), which has been used to organize subsequent events, including panels and other professional development workshops at American Folklore Society meetings.

Building upon this work, a small working group met April 21-22, 2015, to assess strategies found in the 2012 Leadership, Succession, and Transition Planning report. The Peer Learning Leadership Working Group (cheerfully referred to as “POLLYWOG”) included Christina Barr, Andy Kolovos, Selina Morales, Lisa Rathje, and Sally Van de Water. This report presents a summary of the working group retreat and is organized into the following sections:

- 1) Outlining our process;
- 2) Identifying significant themes in 2013 report and in subsequent discussions;
- 3) Creating actionable goals for our working group, with comments on our scope; and
- 4) Creating next steps and a timeline.

One of the primary goals for this group is to create a space for thinking about professional goals and individual growth in the field of folklore. This working group contributes to the health of the field of folklore as it builds a network of peers who can support and sustain one another. We believe that such networks are essential as our discipline continues to grow. For us, the current practice of "leadership" in the fields of public folklore is complicated by dynamic shifts in the ways that our economy and funding structures work, generational differences in one's approach to work and professionalization, and the changing terrain of the field of folklore itself. The future wellbeing of our field rests on our collective ability to develop a strong, coherent, broadly relevant vision for the future.

This working group focuses upon the ways we can strengthen opportunities for healthy leadership development by emphasizing the shared values and vision for the field. In identifying the relevance of the work done by folklorists in diverse non-profits and creating an overlay with this small group’s vision for the field, we began to discern pathways to not only leadership, but to growth for the field of folklore. Just as a pollywog is a small organism of a vast and interconnected ecosystem, our POLLYWOG group started with a report that shares comments and reflections of over 50 individual folklorists who care about leadership in the field. In looking at the themes, areas of expertise, and important questions that arise in that report, this working group realized that we are capable of potentially articulating a process that can inform and

facilitate opportunities for folklorists throughout the field to discern points of entry to this work and to think strategically about their own needs for pathways to leadership within the field. We aren't offering a straight pathway, but instead hope that this report, and subsequent, ongoing work by POLLYWOG, offers strategic opportunities to articulate: 1) the public value of our work in folklore; 2) the significance of a process-oriented approach to leadership development; and 3) that we (the members of this working group) can continue to be personally enriched by this work.

Our process

During our two day meeting, we established a collective "think tank" process of discussion and note taking that culminated in the articulation of a set of shared values, and a desire to use these values a springboard for future collaboration and field-wide conversations.

Our process included:

- 1) An opening discussion about what we hoped to achieve over the next two days of collaboration.
- 2) Reviewing the 2012 Leadership, Succession, and Transition Planning report and identifying prominent and relevant themes for discussion. Together, we looked at "back section" of the 2012 report where over 50 folklorists contributed areas they would like to learn more about, as well as identified specific areas of expertise.
- 3) A discussion that recognized the mix of personal and professional values that creates the foundation for our work (and the work of most folklorists). We noted that it was important and motivating that all of us at the meeting came from distinct and diverse professional places.
- 4) Identifying questions and themes beyond the 2012 report that were interesting and resonated for us.
- 5) Continuing over the next two days to drill down into the these themes and identify specific issues and topics for future thinking and discussion, with a goal of identifying tangible and shareable results to our work. Then aligning these themes with the value statements that we had created.

We agreed that we would commit to continuing this work together. We agreed that we would seek mechanisms for making this an inclusive and field-wide process and creative ways of disseminating the results of our work.

Significant Themes

As noted above, our group spent quite a bit of time looking through the 2012 PACT report to identify themes or questions that seemed to particularly resonate for us in this working group. Subsequent brainstorming on these themes provided us a couple of places that made sense for our own focus. We share below some of the themes we identified, and then we spend more time on the theme that we particularly chose to address in our own work.

Identifying qualities of leadership and workplace culture

We are immersed in a culture that correlates professional maturation to increased executive/administrative responsibility over the course of a career. As a result of these broader cultural assumptions about professional trajectory, attaining a high level administrative position is frequently viewed as a desirable and necessary aspect of personal and professional success. However, there is more to being a leader than simply being motivated to pursue leadership opportunities, and ambition is not necessarily an indicator of leadership success.

The non-profit sector has been an integral part of public folklore activity for decades. Folklorists have both founded organizations and have functioned professionally within extant organizations greatly expanding the reach and impact of our field.

- What are the core qualities of leadership that suit the values, ethics and methods of our field?
- What are the internal mechanisms of healthy organizations?
- Do these mechanisms reflect the values and ethics of our discipline?
- In what ways can effective leaders impact or facilitate creative, healthy workplaces?

Identifying impacts of new models for doing work and a shifting paradigm related to folklore nonprofits

We identified that there exist new organizational models--including non-profits engaged in micro-enterprise, for-profit social enterprise organizations, radical social entrepreneurs engaged in "Conscious Capitalism", etc.

Additionally, we identified that within many folklore nonprofits we are at a time of significant transition from many founder-led organizations to next-generation nonprofits.

Finally, we identified that there are multiple ways in which generational shifts are impacting this conversation. There are different understandings regarding the balance between professional and personal life, the places and ways in which good work occurs, the motivations for being in this field, as well as the ways in which leaders assert themselves.

Finding practical, "nuts and bolts", proposals for addressing identified needs/skill sets for emerging leaders, mid-career and late-career advancement, and fostering opportunities to mentor early-career folklorists to ensure the future of the field.

We identified that we need to spend time to think deeply about how to invest in career advancement.

Identifying the mission of PACT, as well as better understanding its capacity

PACT has acted as both an advocacy/lobbying organization as well as a peer-group/affinity network for folklife nonprofits. These efforts have included professional development and organizational capacity building as needed (and as leadership has found energy and momentum).

At the end of our themes brainstorming process we identified that an “envelop” that informs the work we do and the conversations we were having could be identified as: ethnography--structure--purpose/vision--ethics. Therefore, in our process we first decided to work upon our own shared “Points of Unity¹” in order to better articulate the next steps and strategic plan for any actionable goals or proposals that we could begin to identify.

Next Steps:

When we began this process, none of us were sure quite where it was headed beyond the urge to continue with the work PACT has been spearheading for the past five years, and to advance the work of the PACT 2012 report on Leadership, Transition and Succession. Our meeting helped us identify several ideas for next steps. These included:

- Create a co-authored piece to be submitted to the Journal of American Folklore or a similar forum for discussion. We are currently anticipating that this article could include an assessment of the identified themes, as well as a sense of how to understand these issues and opportunities. We anticipate that it could read as an assessment of the current “state of public folklore practice.” Moreover, it could also think deeply about the theory of practicing folklore as aligned with a “whole folklorist” model². We see a clear need for this kind of deep thinking. This act of writing a piece that delves into theory and assessment could be seen as a reflective act that will serve as catalyst for better, more thoughtful action down the road.
- Facilitate an AFS forum at the 2015 meeting in Long Beach to creatively present back to our constituency the work that came out of the April meetings, and to solicit feedback.
- Coordinate with PACT to leverage its national network and visibility to accomplish goals, which are currently stated to be: *PACT seeks to coordinate efforts, create collaborative initiatives, and maximize resources among programming and service-related folklife nonprofits, and develop long term institutional strategies for preserving the living cultural*

¹ The concept of developing “points of unity” originated with AORTA (<http://aorta.coop/aorta-points-unity-0>).

² *[Public folklorists] possess the wherewithal to be true public servants and, hence, whole folklorists. By combining our academic training as scholars and fieldworks with our grasp of grants, bureaucracies, and the nuances of cultural productions, we are able not only to inform the general public regarding cultural traditions but also to serve as documentarians, archivists, consultants, mediators, producers, and advocates for those who practice traditions. And we do this best collaboratively, when we simply add our expertise and energy to extant desires and activities.* Jim Leary in *Folklore Forum* 31:2 (2000), p. 47-48

heritage of the United States. PACT also seeks to develop on-going and consistent dialogue with the nation's premier programming federal folklife entities and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The PACT agenda has now evolved to include all aspects of the development, sustenance, and preservation of folklife nonprofit organizations throughout the US, and issues of national importance that relate to folklife nonprofits.

- Meet and connect regularly to continue our work.

Overall, our meeting in Chicago feels like a launch pad for future collaboration and idea sharing in our “think tank” process. We anticipate that the content of our meeting will provide the foundation for several activities and discussion documents. We are committed to seeing this work through.

WORKS CITED

Leary, James P. 2000. From a Potato Hole. *Folklore Forum* (31:2) pp. 47-48.

Morales, Selina, Mal O'Connor, and Sally A. Van de Water. 2013. Leadership, Transition, and Succession in Public Sector Folklore. *CFAR*.

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.afsnet.org/resource/resmgr/Best_Practices_Reports/Morales,_O%27Connor,_Van_de_Wa.pdf

MORE READINGS and RELEVANT LINKS ON PARADIGM SHIFTS and LEADERSHIP

The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2005). *Up Next: Generation Change and the Leadership at Nonprofit Organizations*. Baltimore, MD: Francis Kunreuther. Retrieved from www.aecf.org. (<http://www.aecf.org/resources/up-next/>)

anti-oppression resource and training alliance (AORTA): <http://aorta.coop/>

The Flow Project Presents: *Radical Social Entrepreneurs*. 2011. *Conscious Capitalism: Business Success through Social Good*. Retrieved from <http://www.radicalsocientreps.org/theory/conscious-capitalism/>

Hannum, Kelly M., Jennifer Deal, Liz Livingston Howard, Linshuang Lu, Marian N. Ruderman, Sarah Stawiski, Nancie Zane, and Rick Price (2011). *Emerging Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: Myths, Meaning, and Motivations*. (Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership). Retrieved from <http://www.ccl.org/Leadership/pdf/research/AMEXReportEmergingLeadership.pdf>

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. (2014, July 28). Toward a Nonprofit Theory of Leadership and Organizational Culture. Retrieved from <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/management/24566-toward-a-nonprofit-theory-of-leadership-and-organizational-culture.html>

OTHER RESOURCES

Stanford Social Innovation Review is an award-winning magazine and website that covers cross-sector solutions to global problems. It is written for and by social change leaders in the nonprofit, business, and government sectors who view collaboration as key to solving environmental, social, and economic justice issues. *SSIR* bridges academic theory and practice with ideas about achieving social change. It covers a wide range of subjects, from microfinance and green businesses to social networks and human rights. *SSIR's* aim is both to inform and to inspire. See more at <http://www.ssireview.org> and its parent center: <http://pacscenter.stanford.edu/>

More on the current interest by funders and others on “Cultural Vitality” *“Specifically, we define cultural vitality as evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities.”*
<http://webarchive.urban.org/publications/311392.html>

<http://animatingdemocracy.org/resource/cultural-vitality-communities-interpretation-and-indicators>

<http://www.giarts.org/article/cultural-vitality>

Zappos: A Case Study in “New” Organizational Thinking *(The following links follow the story about Zappos organizational structures. This is not an endorsement of Zappos or its structure. Rather, it is a set of articles about the “bold move” made by this for-profit corporation that may prove interesting.)*

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-leadership/wp/2014/01/03/zappos-gets-rid-of-all-managers/>

<http://www.reviewjournal.com/business/some-210-zappos-employees-take-buyouts-manager-free-policy>

A critique: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2014/01/15/making-sense-of-zappos-and-holacracy/>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-leadership/wp/2015/03/31/zappos-to-employees-get-behind-our-no-bosses-approach-or-leave-with-severance/>

ILLUSTRATION

A World of Difference

“New power” players increasingly expect to actively shape or create many aspects of their lives. That expectation gives rise to a new set of values centered on participation.

OLD POWER VALUES

NEW POWER VALUES

Managerialism, institutionalism, representative governance

Informal, opt-in decision making; self-organization; networked governance

Exclusivity, competition, authority, resource consolidation

Open source collaboration, crowd wisdom, sharing

Discretion, confidentiality, separation between private and public spheres

Radical transparency

Professionalism, specialization

Do-it-ourselves, “maker culture”

Long-term affiliation and loyalty, less overall participation

Short-term, conditional affiliation; more overall participation

SOURCE JEREMY HEIMANS AND HENRY TIMMS

HBR.ORG

Illustration from: Jeremy Heimans and Henry Timms. 2014. “Understanding ‘New Power’”. *Harvard Business Review*. Dec. Issue. <https://hbr.org/2014/12/understanding-new-power>

DISCOGRAPHY (tunes that could provide a running soundtrack for our work)

“Pollywog in a Bog” on *Snacktime!* 2008. Barenaked Ladies.