Cultural Management in the Digital Age
About the Project

In association with its head office in Munich Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai is initiating a two-year project (2020-21) on "Cultural Management in the Digital Age". It will also include contributions from Goethe-Instituts Minsk and Shanghai.

The project aims to build on existing work done by Goethe-Institut on training sessions for cultural managers and develop cultural management expertise. It will involve setting up a curriculum for a summer school with focus on Cultural Management in the Digital Age. Based on the findings of the summer school, a relevant publication will be produced as part of a book sprint and made available as an Open Educational Resource (OER).

The second phase of the programme was a four-week long programme that included eight closed-door workshops between November and December 2020. The sessions tackled topics in the realm of digital cultural management including digital transformation, audience development, technology and art, and building value in cultural businesses, amongst several others.

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Session I - Cutting Through the Noise

The first session in the CMDA series was facilitated by Dr. Nishant Shah, Director of Research at the ArtEZ University of the Arts, and Dr. Padmini Ray Murray - independent design researcher, and founder of feminist design collective, Design Beku.

The session identified the ways in which a cultural manager's work can be translated into digital practices and platforms.

"Technological challenges are not about tech innovation, but about structure and stability." Dr. Shah explored the concept of 'truthiness' - in tech, and in relation to arts and culture. He made us question the structures that exist within the digital realm while he spoke about the origins of data-driven tech and AI.

Citing the example of a story submission into a writing contest by an AI bot,–Dr. Shah raised questions about authorship, authority and authenticity. If AI writes a story, who is the author? Who has the authority over a deceased artist's work? Through the session and peer discussions, the cohort identified and discussed the challenges in their own work through the lenses of authorship, authority, and authenticity.

The three A's provided a framework for exploring a digital practice and allowed them to reimagine their work.

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Session II - Talking Through the Interface

The second session was facilitated by Dr. Padmini Ray Murray and Dr. Nishant Shah. The session explored the idea of the interface, and urged the cohort to imagine the space of the screen and beyond.

Dr. Ray Murray began the session by introducing the concept of an archive. She asked them to expand their idea of an archive, and consider it as a material and conceptual tool. By using communities as experts, one can use archives as a tool to build an infrastructure of care.

She then talked about interfaces. An interface is a well-designed argument. By that definition, a book is a well designed interface. No digital platform is neutral, because an interface is designed to nudge one towards a different kind of behaviour.

Interfaces are culturally defined. Dr. Ray Murray posed the question, "How does one design interfaces that are inclusive?" Eventually, the design of the interface will be more important than the interface. The way forward is through positionality and localisation.

Dr. Ray Murray also posed the question of liveness and interfaces. How does one navigate digital performance spaces? What is 'live' anymore? What is the quality of liveness one wishes to impart?

Dr. Ray Murray reminded the cohort to build the scaffolding instead of the building - as cultural managers, they build infrastructures of care and involve communities in designing and building.

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Session III - Building Value in Creative and Cultural Businesses - Part 1

The third session was facilitated by Anchal Jain - Faculty Co-Chair at Creative & Cultural Businesses Programme (CCBP) at IIM Ahmedabad, India.

Value is contextual and can often depend on various other factors - such as conditioning, positioning, perception, and even time. Using the 'AO Framework', he categorised consumers into three orbits - novice, amateur, and connoisseur. Each consumer values different things in the brand proposition.

He elaborated on the key value drivers for brand propositions - 'exceptionalness', 'rarity', and 'authenticity'. E.R.A. is the DNA of a brand. All three must be present to create a successful brand. There are several ways in which people perceive exceptionalness - cognitive, experiential, and symbolic.

Mr. Jain then explained the Value Market Fit Model - combining the consumer orbits with key ERAs. The novice likes to flaunt their product and perceives exceptionalness as symbolic. The amaetur learns about the product and perceives exceptionalness as something experiential. The connoisseur knows the product and perceives it as cognitive.

How can one create a value creation strategy?
1. Discover your current E.R.A.
2. Reimagine or strengthen your E.R.A.
3. Choose the right exceptionalness drivers to connect with your consumer.
4. Define your new value proposition.

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Session IV - Building Value in Creative and Cultural Businesses - Part 2

In this session, Mr. Jain examined how value can be delivered by cultural businesses.

How do customers experience the value proposition? The holistic value market fit design recognises several dimensions: product design, mental availability, physical availability, revenue model, and cost model; all come to the market packaged as a brand.

The customer experience journey starts before they purchase a product or service, and lasts even after they do. To build a successful brand, one must provide holistic experiences that include rational, sensorial, emotional, physical, and symbolic aspects. Cultural managers must focus on consistently delivering their value proposition across every touchpoint of a customer service.

On the backend, holistic value combines integrated capabilities (people, technology, processes, optimisation) and value-based funding (business plans, asset reallocation and external funding.)

To create value, one needs to reflect and rebuild their value proposition for the right audience. Their aim should be to ensure their brand identity is the same as their brand perception. Creating a sustainable venture with a business model that creates holistic design and delivers holistic experiences at all stages through all carriers is key. Good leadership, a good team, and financial support will manifest in improved business results - in sales, profit, and cashflow.

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In session five, Mr. Jain looked at the 'culture' aspect of cultural businesses.

One's culture influences the way we see the world. As every culture sees the same things differently, it can lead to culture distortions. The cultural lenses with which one views the world determines the kind of cultural distortions. These could be reason, emotion, traditional or evasive. Culture influences the value proposition and consumer behaviour.

The cultural diaspora within India, and globally, has the power to take one's voice to larger audiences. The assimilation of current culture, and the rootedness to their home culture can decide whether the consumer rejects an Indian brand or adopts and refers. The route to the spread of cultural goods is to adopt and refer.

What is 'Indianness'? Its uniqueness is the diversity, and the celebration of every individual. How does one harness the uniqueness? Instead of looking at what the market wants, one must look for what value can be created. Harnessing that uniqueness in the brand is what changes people's lives.

One must ask:
1. Is it unique? *Make it personal.*
2. Has it been harnessed well? *Gain skill sets that help in this.*
3. Does it fit in? *Be passionate.*
4. Does it stand out? *Do the research.*

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Session VI - Creating Culture in a Digital Era

How does one create in the digital space and plan for it? What are the tools, protocols and mindset that best suit the needs of the hour?

Instigated by short impulse talks by Archana Prasad - Founder & Director of Jaaga.in - the sixth session delved into some of the core challenges and learnings from lived experiences of transitioning to and working in the digital space.

To build culture, a specific need or community must be addressed. In this, it is key to identify what impact is desired and who the target of the impact is. Through collaboration, learning, and conversation can the context be framed.

Conversations build value. Value increases over time, as connections grow. Cultural managers must build and support communities and focus on lateral audience development. Ms. Prasad explained that brand identity must switch from personal and intimate, to digital and global. To maintain brand equity, a manager must identify the kind of experiences that need to be created, and the management systems needed to achieve those.

The discussion oriented session created space for making, adapting, and having conversations to learn from peers about how to develop best practices and inculcate a culture of open innovation, collaborative practice and active listening.

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The seventh session was facilitated by Rashmi Dhanwani - Founder-Director of Art X Company, which explored existing approaches to audience development and introduced the peculiarities of digital audiences.

Before the session, the cohort filled out a quiz to identify their audiences, how they connect with them, their likes and dislikes, and the major concerns they share about their audiences.

Using data points from the quiz, Ms. Dhanwani explained audience segmentation and the different ways in which audiences can be categorized based on what is known about them. Several factors affect digital audiences - devices, platforms, reach, online behaviours, influences, and motivations.

By exploring aspects of audience accessibility online, and data touchpoints for understanding audiences, the session used case studies and discussion to provide pathways to critically view the audience as a market, big data as numbers, and community as a vibrant organism.

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Session VIII - Closing Session

The eighth and closing session was facilitated by Dr. Nishant Shah and Dr. Padmini Ray Murray as they discussed the key learnings from the programme.

The session began with the 3-2-1 exercise:
3 things learned from the experience;
2 things that required deeper exploration;
1 thing that needed to be discussed more.

Dr. Shah asked the cohort to think about digital as a space with process and intention. He pointed towards a focus on economies of intensity instead of economies of scale - a network that circulates information not as a default but one that intensifies and circulates with care. The key to moving forward is a movement from individual to collective, to question what institutional spaces stand for, and how arts and culture can bring value to society.

Dr. Ray Murray reminded the cohort that the digital space is not in opposition to the physical; the two can co-exist. She encouraged them to bring the conversation to the community while working with them. Digital allows for the possibility of scale, but also allows for the opposite of scale - a different type of intimacy. Being digital does not always mean being networked. Understanding the way audiences interact with the digital is crucial - they cannot make assumptions about it.

As inflow and funding for the arts reduce, organisations must collaborate. One must push for democratisation of digital spaces. The way forward is collective.

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