Cultivating Leadership in Arts, Culture, Education, and Social Change: A Field Scan

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Good evening from South Africa!

I will be sharing with you my discoveries from a field scan of "cultivating leadership in arts, culture, education, and social change". I serve as the Director of Leadership and Learning for Creative Generation.

By means of introduction: I am a violinist and educator, and growing up in post-Apartheid South Africa, music has always been about sharing and bringing together diverse communities, which also lead me to mediation training, conflict resolution, and dialogue facilitation.

As I was passionate and inquisitive to bring together more people, I gradually began to lead different communities in and outside of music and the arts, throughout South Africa and abroad.

I am also supporting a family restaurant, so growing up in both a kitchen and on stage, my life has been this dynamic interplay of explosive roles and transferable skills.

As a result, I am drawn to others who possess this kind of dynamic, explorative way of life, leaders of their respective communities. Being a beneficiary of several leadership training opportunities, I wanted to explore how leadership can be cultivated. What characteristics are taken into consideration for young leaders to undergo training? Which are the key attributes to these training programs and how do they catalyse youth leadership?

To answer my research questions, my field scan identified notable programs that fit the description: What are the training programs focused on raising young leaders? Subsequent questions include: Who attends and what is the selection process? How are those programs set up? What is the duration, intensity, and expected outcomes? What are the conspicuous benefits of being trained?

How can succession planning be encouraged and implemented? What can be done to close the gaps in leadership pipelines? How can young leaders be trained to disrupt creatively and exercise their capabilities, contributing to organizational sustainability?

I discovered that training programs designed specifically for youth leadership do exist, though most notably in silos of education, technology, international development, and social entrepreneurship. Additionally, in specific streams of the arts, arts education, teaching artistry, and arts management. As an attempt to broaden and reach beyond the silos, various incubation models, training, and apprenticeship programs and curriculums in other fields were also considered. Succession planning in organizations is not a given. Oftentimes there are gaps in leadership pipelines, which leave institutions in a vulnerable position in terms of sustainability.

Several limitations are present, including gaps in interdisciplinary approaches, and the absence of holistic models. Other limitations include resource allocations within training programs, industry specific requirements, application procedures, training duration, geographical specificities, and outcome design. One particular observation is that all of these programs were conceptualized prior to Covid-19, therefore posing possible deficiencies in the present landscape.

A thorough scan revealed the rarity of organizations offering such training. There was a definitive gap in the field in terms of sustainability, succession planning, and raising the next generation.

I noticed that different institutions in different sectors had components of youth leadership. Many had in-house training programs. There were also organizations whose vision and mission were dedicated to training youth leaders. How well-funded programs were was directly connected to the duration of the program, the history of the organization, as well as prestige generated from its alumni.

Let me share 3 examples: the Fulbright Scholar Program, the TED Fellows Program, and the Global Leaders Program.
Fulbright Scholar Program was established in 1946, and is currently administered by the US State Department, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Its signature trait are the international initiatives highlighting a wide array of partnerships in both public and private sectors to exchange knowledge and networks for its scholars and students. Diversity and the cross cultural dimension enables a wider reach and broader impact.

TED Fellows Program convenes the next generation of innovators and provides transformational coaching and platforms to launch ideas. It seeks trailblazers in all disciplines who have demonstrated remarkable achievement in their respective fields. Submissions are based on innovation, expertise, and potential for impact.

Global Leaders Program emerged after the Sistema Fellowship Program and is aimed at arts change-makers to grow organizations. The cohort is formed annually of 50 seasoned music professionals. Its one-year curriculum encompasses social entrepreneurship, cultural agency, community development, business management and teaching artistry. Fellows

participate in international residencies. Strategic partnerships are formed with a network of high-profile individuals, universities, think tanks and fieldwork hosts.

Beyond the examples I have shared, all programs had the following attributes in common: networking, experiential learning, skills development, mentoring by elders, field work, and community service.

In contrast, there were divergent ideas among groups within the cohort I evaluated, including exclusive attention on industry-specific challenges, lack of interdisciplinary collaborations, and merging of silos. This can be viewed as a focused approach. I would argue however, that exclusive focal points narrow the possibility of identifying gaps, connecting the dots, and thereby missing the potential of extending creative solutions.

So, what conditions are to be set up in order to enable and support young leaders in the field of arts, culture, education, and social change with expanded insights and practical skills to exercise their leadership?

By identifying relevant, transferable, and applicable skills and qualities. Addressing sustainability and longevity of organizations, I noticed gaps in succession planning as well as its implementation. Since process and product delivery are led by people; what do leadership pipelines look like, how are they designed and by whom? What are the key considerations? And what is the approach to talent acquisition?

1.Attracting a cohort with the desired qualities and qualifications: the participants are highly skilled in more than one area of expertise and possess numerous value adds. Calls for application happened over a length of time, individuals then intentionally selected.

What, how, and where can out-of-the box thinkers, movers and shakers be found, with excitement and enthusiasm to match? Assembling the dream team: what are the resources, networks, skills, knowledge, and people to make it happen?

2.Program design and deliverable outcomes: managing effective and efficient work flow and priorities. Establishing a middle way for doing the much needed work of the field vs creating new business and reaching new audiences.

How are new knowledge and practice produced? How can win-win research and collaborations be set up and executed in a sustainable manner?

3.Mentoring and developing leadership both horizontally and vertically: through the training program, develop and share capabilities to influence peers and contemporaries, leaders and juniors in a positive manner.

How can the self be cultivated whilst nurturing others? How do trainees be both a mentor and a mentee? In other words, how can the process be dynamic and reciprocal, thereby creating a virtuous cycle?

Skills included applicants' demonstrated expertise in their chosen field. Familiarity with technology and research posed to be a given. Advanced written, verbal, and digital communication skills including familiarity with social media was desirable. One point to note is the language medium in which training programs are conducted – majority are English, in which case the applicant must be comfortable and fluent in English. Who in the room would we lose should candidates not be able to operate in the global currency of the English language?

Certain qualities, pre-existing or cultivated, stand out: individuals who display a sense of curiosity and invention, as well as an ability to innovate. Generosity in learning and sharing was also a highlight. In addition, those who possessed existing and expanding networks, experiences in different intersections and outside of their dominant professional silos. There seemed to be a lean towards diversity and mixed heritage, with continental representation and consideration for global south applicants. Track record of community service of any kind was also encouraged.

From my observations, youth leadership can be activated and exercised through innovation and collaboration. By setting up enabling frameworks to experiment ideas, test theories, pilot projects - skill sets can be developed and showcased accordingly. Identifying and grouping immersive cohorts in entrepreneurial hubs provides youth with intellectual stimulation to ideate amongst good company, in combination with regular reflections and feedback can result in new learnings, new ways of learning, and knowledge systems.

No comprehensive training program exists for arts, culture, education, and social change leaders. By identifying the tools to design new hybrid and virtual models of youth leadership training, the existing landscape can be changed. By making the circle bigger, role models can be identified, new leaders raised through collaborations, leadership pipelines set up and organizations be made future proof. By ensuring that young creatives are well-equipped to lead, sustainability no longer poses as the elephant in the room. Youth leaders are therefore able to fulfil civic responsibilities in conjunction with their artistic, educative, and societal missions.

Thank you and I welcome your reflections and questions in the chatbox.